

16382 -

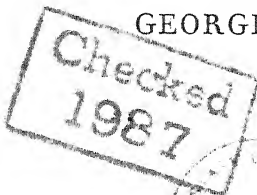
5-34

# RUSSIA TRIUMPHANT

*The Story of the Russian  
People*

by

GEORGE SAVA



FABER AND FABER LTD  
LONDON

RUSSIA  
TRIUMPHANT

16389
G. 36.
96

96



by the same author

★

*The Healing Knife*  
*A Surgeon's Destiny*  
*Beauty from the Surgeon's Knife*  
*A Ring at the Door*  
*Twice the Clock Round*  
*Rasputin Speaks*  
*They Stayed in London*  
*Donkey Serenade*  
*Valley of Forgotten People*  
*A Tale of Ten Cities*  
*School for War*  
*War without Guns*  
*The Chetniks*

## PREFACE

saint to whom it is given to know that the meek shall inherit the earth.

The spread of the Russian domain eastward, and its gradual growth into the greatest land empire in the world, was due not—as the growth of the British Empire was due—to the buccaneering exploits of adventurers in search of wealth, but to the grim determination of the Russian common people to be free. So, in many other ways, the effect of their will and their power may be traced in Russian history.

That is the theme of my book—that and the thesis that the quality of the Russian people springs from the land in which it has been nurtured. It does not deny the power of autocrats and boyars, of landlords and bureaucrats. It does not disguise the misery of the people, their sufferings, or their faults. It does not seek to take away from the great ones of history that glory which is rightly theirs, nor does it seek to put a false lustre on the reputations of those who bled and tortured the land and the people.

The Russian is not a formalist, like the German, seeking to express himself in cast-iron systems and efficient organizations. He is rather a mystic groping ever for a hidden truth beyond the immediate apprehensions of his senses. Even when he embraces a creed like dialectical materialism he gives to it a religious fervour and a sense of urgency not inherent in it and probably never dreamed of by its founder. And he has a transcendental, though often unrealized, sense of unity with his fellow-men and with his land. That shows itself in war and in peace, in the defence of Moscow and of Stalingrad, and in the great communal efforts of the Five-Year Plans.

There is nothing surprising in the fact that a small piece of the vast Russian earth is more valuable to the peasant who tills it than any other reward that his State and master can bestow upon him. He is more like the artist who would rather starve than be parted from his clay. He labours under the plough, regardless whether his land be part of the rich Ukraine or the frozen Siberian *tundra*. This attachment to the earth of his forefathers is the sole reason for the bloodiest revolutions that he has fought during the centuries of Russian history.

As the theme develops in this book, so these points will, I hope, emerge more clearly. But I think it right that they should be stated now.

There is one other point. This book is not a late flowering of the nineteenth-century Slavophil movement, which thought it had found all virtue in the Russian peasant. It sees in him neither perfect saint nor total sinner. It merely strives to point out the power of his will;

# CONTENTS

## PREFACE

page 5

## BOOK I. THE RUSSIANS

1. THE ETERNAL LAND	11
2. THE FIRST TILLERS	17
5. MOTHER OF RUSSIA	26
4. FATHER OF FREEDOM	40
5. THE EAST WIND	47
6. THE FOREST SEED	53
7. VASSAL INTO EMPIRE	58
8. THE RISE OF THE ROMANOV'S	68
9. THE SHADOW OF SERFDOM	74
10. MICHAEL TO PETER	83
11. THE WEST WIND	92
12. AFTERMATH OF THE GALE	105
13. THE SECOND LOYALTY	113
14. FREEDOM IN FAITH	120
15. THE EVER-FLOWERING TREE	128
16. MOUZHNIK'S MIDNIGHT	133
17. THE FALSE DAWN	141
18. SEEDS OF DEMOCRACY	151
19. THE GREAT FRUSTRATION	160
20. RED MORNING	167

## BOOK II. RUSSIAN CULTURE

1. THE TRADITION	175
2. LITERATURE AND LETTERS	180

# BOOK ONE

## THE RUSSIANS

### *Chapter 1*

## THE ETERNAL LAND

There is something eternal and unchanging about the Russian Land. The British Isles, so geologists tell us, probing with sensitive fingers into the secrets of the immeasurable past, have been in the course of ages now sea, now land, and have only recently—on the geologists' time-scale, in which a million years is a small unit—taken on their present shape, which is changing even to-day under the action of the sea, which is the islands' lifeblood. But the Russian Land, that great stretch which spans Europe and Asia and belongs to both and to neither, has known no such vicissitudes.

In Siberia, there is a tract of land which science asserts is part of the original cooled crust of the earth. It has been neither submerged by the sea, nor folded and thrust up into mountain chains. And if the rest of this subcontinent cannot claim the same antiquity and absence of change, at any rate it belongs to the parent land-mass of the world. It is a land of boundless spaces, of long magnificent rivers, a land of primeval forests that even now resist the onward march of man.

Just as the ever-nearness of the sea has shaped and determined the British destiny, so the great plains have moulded the fate of the peoples that have inhabited the Russian Land; and so the great plains will ever influence the habits and ideals of the peoples. The horizons of the Russian people are illimitable. They stretch ever into the distance, and there is always something beyond. It is only by marching east across the whole of Asia that one comes at last to the

## THE RUSSIANS

sea, whose horizons have the same quality of elusiveness. If one goes north, one comes again to the sea, it is true. But it is a reluctant sea. For many months in the year it is solid ice and seems but to continue the white, snow-clad plains of the mainland onward.

Some of the plains are rich and fertile; others are barren and inhospitable. But everywhere, even in the eternally frozen *tundra* of the Far North, there is earth of some kind. And it is from this earth, prolific or miserly, that the peoples of the Russian Land have since the beginning drawn their living. It is the plains, the unending plains, that have made the Russians of to-day, the Russians of historical times, peasants wedded to the land. But it is not only the economy of the peoples that the plains have made. They have, too, given the peoples their special character, a character so old that it can be traced back to epochs long before the great Slav family took possession of the soil.

In these great spaces man becomes a natural wanderer. He may move from place to place, day after day, and still find his surroundings familiar. The horizon beckons. If he marches on he will come to a river and then to a forest. There are nomad tribes in the Russian Land to-day—in the north, the east, and the south-east, though they are dying out. And the Russian, the modern Russian, remains an eternal wanderer at heart. He belongs rather to the land as a whole than to any particular part of it. His inheritance is so vast that he can afford to be generous with it. He values that freedom of movement above all else. And it is because they fail to recognize this fact that so many invaders have made vast territorial conquests in the Russian Land only to find themselves at last defeated.

The theme of the land runs like a Wagnerian *leitmotiv* through the whole of Russian history—and even appears in the overture played before the great drama of the *Rus* began to be enacted. No one knows who the aboriginal inhabitants of the land were. It is likely that they were among the earliest races of Man. Some authorities see the cradle of the species in Mesopotamia, others in Central Asia. But if either be right, it seems likely that these first men must have been passed westwards or northwards through the Russian plains, learning something of their secrets and of the mysteries of the dark birch forests.

When history dawns, it seems almost as though the plains had already established their mastery over the characters of the inhabitants. The land was dominating their actions, and they remained nomads. There were invaders—but none stayed. They were beaten not by the nomad peoples, barbaric in culture and primitive in resources, but by the land and the use these peoples made of it.

## THE ETERNAL LAND

The earliest inhabitants of the land of whom we have any authentic record were the Scythians. Even of these our knowledge is shadowy. They seemed to have dwelt on the southern steppes of present-day Russia. Old Herodotus, that portrayer of the ancient world, devotes almost the whole of the fourth book of his history to the Scythians. Much of it is fancy, yet there remains a basis of fact. And part of what is factual tells as a prototype of a recurrent theme in Russian history the story of the invasion of these steppes by Darius, the great Persian king and conqueror.

Darius was in control of the greatest military organization in the world—an empire that embraced many subject peoples. It was the revolt of one of these peoples—the Babylonians—that set his armies in action, and, in 516 B.C., after a twenty months' siege, Babylon was reduced. Like so many conquerors, Darius was spurred on by this success. Moving his forces northwards he resolved to attack the Scythians. His forces were probably the largest that had, up to that time, ever been gathered together. They carried all before them, not only by reason of their weight of numbers, but also because of their ingenuity in overcoming obstacles. Darius knew, as every successful general knows, the importance of what we now call engineering. In 507 B.C. he built his famous floating bridge across the Bosphorus and invaded the Scythian land.

The Scythians, as Herodotus points out, were only one, though the most important, of the peoples inhabiting the southern steppes. Their first reply to the Darian threat was to send envoys to the other tribes in order to create a coalition of defence. But the tribes did not see eye to eye with the Scythians, who had dropped some of their nomad habits and had begun to form settlements for agriculture. Perhaps these tribes felt they had as much to fear from the Scythians as from the Persians and preferred the unknown tyranny to the known.

A pitched battle between the Scythian and Persian forces could have but one outcome—the victory of Darius; and the Scythians, knowing their land and the habits of their people, decided to adopt other means of foiling the invader. 'They planned', says Herodotus,<sup>1</sup> 'not to fight a pitched battle openly . . . but to retire before the Persians and to drive away their cattle before them, choking up with earth the wells and the springs of water by which they passed and destroying the grass from off the ground, having parted themselves for this into two bodies. . . .'<sup>2</sup>

Like the Cossacks, who were centuries later to succeed them in occupancy of the southern steppes round the Don, the Scythians were fine horsemen, and they sent the pick of their light cavalry to recon-

<sup>1</sup> Macaulay's translation.

<sup>2</sup> Herodotus, bk. iv, ch. 120.

## THE RUSSIANS

another master of Europe, a self-appointed general, hurled his all-conquering armies into the Russian plains. They found burnt and shattered factories, wrecked roads, crops turned to ashes, 'scorched earth'. Nearly two thousand years before, Darius had found choked wells and grass 'destroyed from off the ground' . . .

Eternal and unchanging is the Russian Land. And because of that the character of its people tends also to be eternal and unchanging. No land has been more racked by revolution than Russia. Ivan the Great and Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great and Lenin, even the ill-starred Tsar Alexander II: each was to a greater or less extent a revolutionary. Each in his way worked changes; and the work of each served only to bring more sharply into focus the eternal nature of the Russian people. One of these might have been a self-seeking monster; another a westernizing giant; a third a vaguely liberal autocrat; a fourth a communist embarked on a vast experiment in human existence; but in the end the work of every one of them stood or fell by its effects on the land. It is not until the rulers of Russia get to grips with the salt of the Russian Land that their success or failure is determined.

The destiny of Britain has been ruled by the sea. Her great men's eyes have ever been turned outwards looking for a larger world than the small island that cradled them. Her people have ingrained in them something of the mutable spirit of the sea. But the Russian people for centuries barely knew of the sea. They were aware only of vast plains stretching into infinity, as it seemed. Their eyes turned inwards. While the British moved outwards over the world, meeting, conquering, making trade with new races and new peoples, the Russians looked inwards into unpeopled spaces.

And so it is that there are affinities and vast differences between the British and the Russian peoples. Both have the same love of movement, the desire to see what lies beyond the next horizon. Both feel the lure of space. But the outlook is not the same. The Russian looks inward on his own land; and it is that, perhaps, which has given him his curious introspectiveness, his indifference to time. He is a product of his land, and so will remain.

It is only in recent records that the chroniclers speak of Russia or the Russian Empire. Earlier, it was always the Russian Land or the Land of the Rus. The distinction is not without significance. Nationhood on the western model came late to the Russians. But the land was there always. And it was the land that unified the Russian peoples, as later it was to disrupt them and then lead them to a stronger unity.



## Chapter 2

# THE FIRST TILLERS

**T**he story of Darius and the Scythians is a summer-lightning flash illuminating for a brief second the darkness that wraps the early history of the Russian Land. The references to the peoples and the way of life of the steppe country are few and vague among the earliest historians; and much of what we do know is merely legend, built up of travellers' tales in a period that, while producing the great philosophers of Greece, was also credulous and unscientific, eager to believe the marvellous rather than the commonplace explanation. For some time after Herodotus, it became the custom to refer to all the peoples of the northern lands as Scythians, but it is now believed that the true Scythians were mainly Iranians (Persians). Yet there is evidence that Slav tribes appeared on the terrain at quite an early date. No doubt these intermingled with the Iranian tribes, and philologists tell us that the Russian language contains many indications of Iranian contacts.

The Samartians were also powerful in those remote times on the Russian steppes. These people too were of Iranian origin, and their descendants, speaking an almost pure Iranian tongue, may still be found in the remoter reaches of the Caucasus; these are the Ossetines. But neither of these primitive holders of the land was destined to possess it fully.

Somewhere about 400 B.C. the first Greek colonists arrived and built their cities. Greek colonization was unlike later developments of spreading peoples. The Greeks took their culture and their civilization with them and established on foreign soil counterparts of their Hellenic homes. They do not appear to have taken much interest in the aboriginal peoples of the lands in which they settled, except perhaps as sources of supply of those slaves on which their social system was based.

Thus Greek colonization has played an entirely negligible part in the development of Russia. The Greek colonial cities spread a bright girdle of culture round the shores of the Euxine, and some of the gems they set have been recovered by archaeologists and set up in museums. But there is no trace of Greek cultural influence on the early conduct of Russian affairs. Strangely enough, however, it was



## THE RUSSIANS

to the inheritors of the Greek culture, the Byzantines, that later the people of the Russian Land were to turn for guidance. But that was not to be till centuries had passed.

The barbarian irruption forced its way across the Greek towns of the Euxine; the cities disappeared, and with them the culture on which a civilized Russian state might have been erected. By the third century of the present era, the Goths ruled in the western part of the steppe country. The Avaras and the Huns devastated the rich Greek settlements and passed westward on their conquering course.

It was a time of great migrations when the whole assemblage of Teutonic peoples was staking out its claims in Europe. In the Far North were Finnish tribes, speaking a language—as the Finns do to-day—that is not of Aryan origin and is more allied to Turkish and Magyar. Before the violent forces of the Teuton hordes and, to a less extent, the Slavonic tribes, the Finns were slowly retreating farther and farther to the north, through the dense forests, where their descendants linger yet.

In the region of the Pripet Marshes, so famous in the annals of both Russia and Poland, were some insignificant tribes that were destined to be the heirs of the Russian Land. This tract of country was the birthplace of the Slavs, and there are some authorities who contend that in the neighbourhood to the south of Minsk the dialect spoken comes nearest to the original Slavonic tongue. Even in those times the Slavs had their urge towards migration. They spread along the banks of the Dnieper and perhaps at one time reached the shores of the Black Sea, where once the proud Greek cities had stood. But they were nomads with little organization, following the tradition of their Scythian predecessors. They retreated into the vast spaces of the interior when their progress was challenged. Why, indeed, should they fight for possession of a little tract of land when so much was available elsewhere?

We know, we can know, little of these people. They were primitive, without knowledge of writing. Their standard of culture was low. But, unrecorded, they were playing the first scenes—or perhaps the curtain-raiser—of one of the greatest adventures in history: the peopling of the western fringes of Europe. Their work was ceaseless. They did not war much with the neighbouring peoples—had they done so, we should, perhaps, have more knowledge of them—but they were nevertheless constantly at war with other forces. Their tribes moved north and south, east and west, through the dense forests, making clearings on the banks of those many great rivers which are the skeleton of the Russian Land: the founders of Russia warred against trees, a dense, countless army of trees that pressed

## THE FIRST TILLERS

thick on the venturous invader from all sides. The achievement of those early pioneers is none the less because it has not been sung by a Homer or a Virgil.

To-day, in the *taigà* of the far north of what we know as Russia, the forest is much as it must have been in those distant times; and the strength of the *taigà* is such that even modern man, with all his mechanical appliances, cannot easily subdue it. There are pines, and there are firs—grim, dark trees that climb into the sky. But above all there are the silver birches that are the special grace of the Russian Land. They grow thick, in the summer shutting out the sun, in the winter holding up the snow in their innumerable arms so that it forms a white roof.

It was this primeval forest, the great fortress of the vegetable kingdom, that these aboriginal Slavs challenged with their crude implements. And though the battle was hard, here and there they won their victories and made a settlement, to which the invincible trees were always returning. And here, in the dark recesses of their forest homes, the Slavs forged part of that character which distinguishes them even to-day. They mingled with the remnants of the retreating Finn tribes and learnt from them the secret of living in a climate that was too severe for almost every living thing but Man. They acquired that sense of direction which so many travellers have remarked. Above all, they won for themselves that toughness of body and soul which has astounded the world over and over again. Only the fittest, the strongest, the most agile of mind and limb, could survive amid the trees of the plain; and it was from these survivors that the Russian people sprang.

If the history of this period could be written, it would make one of the greatest epics of Man's conquest of the Earth. But it can never be, for Man's greatest achievements, the things that made him Man, were all made long before the art of writing was developed. The discovery of fire and artificial light, the domestication of animals and plants, the conversion of the wild grasses into wheat and rye and barley—these events belong to an age that we shall never know as we know, say, the era of the Caesars or the life of ancient Athens. And among these victories, the successful assault of the Slavs on the virgin forest ranks high.

Unnamed men toiled amid the trees, making their rude homes, exploring the country, and gradually working out the details of the Russian river system, along which they floated their logs. Discoverers that might rank with Galileo and Newton bred beasts and plants that would survive the hard conditions. But this anonymity is characteristic. The great work of Russia was done, as it was to be

## THE RUSSIANS

done for centuries to come, by the unknown peasant, the ordinary man, mute, concerned only with his job, and hardly conscious of the courage and determination, the hardihood and the strength, the untutored lore that is deeper and richer than learning, which he brought to the task he had undertaken. Indeed, he did not appreciate the magnitude of the task, as he knew nothing of the vastness of the land in which he moved. His aim was merely to live. Tomorrow might be anything. Yet he must have had a confidence in the morrow and his survival that was not consciously realized. And it is from that confidence, driving him to hack and hew his way through the pines and the firs and the silver birches, that the Russian people was born, a people that even in the shadow of scientific marvels such as the Dnieper Dam still retain a simple, primal faith.

From the settlements, tribes grew. Some of these tribes coalesced to form the germ plasma of nationhood; but it was not fertilized and it took long to grow. It was like something in suspended animation that needed an outside influence to awaken it. To change the figure, it was like a vessel of supercooled water requiring the touch of ice to change it into a solid, cohesive mass.

It was in the ninth century A.D. that this outside influence came. Soon after 850 a great Scandinavian migration struck south along the rivers till it reached the Russian plain. According to some ancient legends, it was the Slav people themselves, conscious of their disunity and their helplessness in the face of the virile nations with which their wanderings brought them into contact, who asked the Scandinavians to rule over them and bring out their latent nationhood. More probably the irruption was due to the same urge that forced other branches of the great family of Northmen to sail their frail ships across the Atlantic, to occupy Sicily, and to lay the foundations of European nation after European nation. Yet it is pleasant to believe the legend, which is so typically Russian in its humility and in its acceptance of the stranger on his merits, not as a foreigner to be despised or exploited, but as a fellow-man.

If we look at a map, Russia seems a vast place—as indeed it is. The area of the European part of what is now the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic—the old ‘Russia in Europe’ of the Tsars—amounts to more than one and a half million square miles. It is wrong and gives a false perspective to history to think of the first Slavonic state as a region of that extent. Let us take a look at it as it was when Russian history dawned. Its northern boundary lay south of the Neva and of the marshes on which Peter built his capital; it had no Baltic coast. Eastwards, it did not reach as far as the site on which Moscow was to rise. Southwards, the people had not yet pene-

## THE FIRST TILLERS

trated the steppe country, except perhaps sporadically, and the Black Sea coast was in 'foreign' hands. On the west, the Bug formed the frontier, though Slavonic tribes had broken off from the main stock and travelled farther west into territories we now know as Moravia, Bohemia, and Croatia.

The whole of the northern fringe was peopled by Finns, as were the Urals, though even then these tribes were weakening and dying; along the Gulf of Riga dwelt the fierce Lithuanians; and to the south were Turkish tribes, warlike and enterprising, who had here and there interbred with the Finnish peoples they had overcome. Among them were the Khazars and the Bulgars, the former owing some allegiance to the Jewish faith, the latter then Muslims.

Marking off these boundaries on the map, one realizes how small was the bud from which modern Russia has flowered. It was then little bigger than Norway and Sweden put together.

To this country came the Scandinavians, taking advantage of the great north-and-south river system of the land. Under the leadership of Rurik they settled. They founded the famous city of Novgorod. They not only conquered; they mingled freely with the Slavs—just as, a little later, in western Europe, another originally Scandinavian people, the Normans, were to mingle with the conquered English; and in the same way a new and more virile nation was born.

These invaders or migrants—for they were something different from mere conquerors—are usually known as Varangians, and their original home is said to have been in the country round Upsala in Sweden. Their first victories were won over the Finns, by whom they were called 'Rus', a word meaning 'rowers', and derived from the long-oared ships so typical of all the Norsemen. The name began to be applied to all the inhabitants of the Russian Land, and thus it came about that the Slav people acquired, in the birth-pangs of their nationality, a name applied by a non-Aryan-speaking race to a foreign conqueror.

The conquest and settlement was not without bloodshed. If, as legend says, Rurik came by invitation, that invitation cannot have been unanimous. There are plenty of stories of native uprisings wherever the Varangians penetrated—and of their bloody suppression. Mercy, it seems, was no more a quality of theirs than of the Vikings who ravaged the coasts of England, Ireland, France, and Spain.

All these events centred on Novgorod, about the foundation of which there seems some doubt. According to the ancient *Kiev Chronicle*, an almost contemporary record of Russian history from the close of the ninth to the beginning of the twelfth century,

## THE RUSSIANS

'... He (Rurik) went forward to the Ilmen, fortified a little town on the Volkhov, and called it Novgorod, the New City'. This seems like a foundation; yet only a few lines further on the ancient chronicler remarks: '... the first inhabitants of Novgorod were Slavs'. It is a small point and does nothing to destroy the claim of old Novgorod to be the cradle of the Russian nation. For it may be that those who ruled in Novgorod were invaders; yet it was they who fused the Slav tribes together into a coherent whole, much as the Normans—of the same stock, let it be repeated—finally welded together the Anglo-Saxons into the English nation.

Novgorod became in due time the headquarters of Russian freedom, enjoying a liberty of government that some have held to be quite incompatible with the Slav temperament. Quite early in these times it showed the spark of that independence which was later to blaze into flame. After two years of Rurik's rule, the Novgorodians rebelled, asserting that they were not slaves, and that they declined to be put upon by Rurik and his nobles. The result of this forlorn but courageous gesture was easily predictable. It was ruthlessly suppressed by the Norsemen, whose superior weapons and military abilities made them easy masters of the situation. The rebel leader was put to death—no doubt unpleasantly—and all of his followers on whom the Varangians could lay hands were either punished on the spot or sent into exile into the vast Russian plain. Thus early the theme of exile in the wilderness creeps into Russian history.

It was not in the temperament of the Norsemen to stand still. Like the Russians themselves they were born wanderers, but the driving force in them was different. While the Russian wandered simply because a man born in large spaces hates to feel confined and hedged about, the Norsemen marched onward in search of ever-richer loot and treasure. They were the forerunners of the empire-builders of later centuries the world over. Fighting was their creed. Their gods and blessed ones waged eternal combat in Valhalla, pausing only to refresh themselves at coarse and gargantuan banquets. The conception was only a projected idealization of their own way of life on earth. The Norsemen fought because to him fighting was the greatest and most pleasurable of occupations and brought him the means of satisfying all the cravings of his body.

Urged on, then, by the insatiable lust of spoil and conflict, the Varangians forced their way southwards, along the great river highways, slaying those who stood across their path, pillaging the towns and hamlets through which they passed. So they came to Kiev, that city which occupies a unique place in Russian history. If Novgorod was the birthplace of the Russian nation, Kiev was the city in which

## THE FIRST TILLERS

it grew through adolescence to first early manhood. It was in Kiev that the young Russian nation stood up and looked its neighbours squarely in the eye. And from Kiev flowed the first stream that was first to plunge into the dark caverns of the Tartar conquest, and later to emerge into the ever-widening river of development into the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union.

Kiev was already a flourishing town when the Varangians came upon it. It may be that Norse traders had already reached it down the rivers. But whether this be so or not, the fact remains that it had become the last outpost of the crude commercial organization of the area round the Black Sea. It had given, through its trade, an outlet to the Byzantine Empire, of which the Slavs had made some use; and no doubt it held, for its period, riches that were not beneath the notice of Rurik and his armies.

Rurik himself seems to have had comparatively little to do with Kiev, which apparently became the headquarters of Varangian bands that owed little more than nominal allegiance to the great leader. Certainly he was not there when, in 865, these indomitable Norsemen played in its first form a theme that was to be repeated with variations throughout the centuries of Russian history. It was in that year that they organized a raid on Constantinople—known to the Rus as Tsargrad—and might have achieved an overwhelming success, if a storm had not broken and dispersed the fleet of two hundred ships with which the Rus were besieging the city. The attack had been cleverly planned to take place while the Emperor Michael III was absent with the bulk of his forces on a war against the Muslims. But for his immediate return and the fortunate storm—scribed to the power of God against the pagan—Tsargrad might well have fallen.

A contemporary account by the Patriarch Photius, who actually witnessed the onset, assigns as a reason for this campaign the fact that the Byzantines had broken a trade agreement. This is significant. It shows, first, that it was no mere foray by the Norsemen in search of richer loot (though no doubt Byzantium was a prize they would willingly have won), and, secondly, that Kiev already had some importance in the primitive commerce of the age. And the results of the attack were decisive. The Slavs and their rulers, hitherto regarded as mere nonentities, even when their existence was recognized, were now promoted to a position of importance and respect. Kiev was seen to be a power to be reckoned with. That change in the attitude of the Byzantines had far-reaching effects. Not least, from our point of view, was the effect of automatically making Kiev the centre of the Russian Land.



## THE RUSSIANS

This venture was led by Askold and Dir, two Varangians who had little in their favour beyond their own undoubted abilities. They were, say the ancient records, neither related to Rurik nor among his acknowledged nobles. Their impudence in thus exalting themselves to the position of renowned leaders of what might, in the circumstances of the times, be called international reputation, was swiftly dealt with. Rurik had been succeeded by Oleg, whose strength was reinforced by his position as the guardian of Igor, Rurik's son. He brought his armies hurriedly to the Kiev region, captured Askold and Dir, and executed them. He then proceeded to make himself master of Kiev and to establish the city as the capital of the new state that was rapidly forming through the welding together of Slav and Scandinavian peoples.

In the eyes of Rurik, of Oleg, and of the Scandinavian 'nobles' as they grandiloquently termed themselves, Askold and Dir may have been mere adventurers of little account, self-seeking men who forgot their duty to their overlords. At this distance of time we are not concerned with whatever niceties of etiquette may have been observed among a people to whom the shedding of blood was a religious duty ecstatically performed. To us, with our perspective view of the long vista of Russian history, it seems that this enterprise of Askold and Dir is one of the truly significant events. Through it, the Russia in formation was brought into contact with Byzantium, the New Rome that has played so decisive a part in Russian affairs. Through it, the new Rus state became acknowledged by the outer world as a warlike one of some pretensions and military skill. Through it, the central government of the Varangians, the makers of Russia, was transferred from Novgorod, in the north, to Kiev in the south.

It is easy to put these three effects down separately, but in fact they cannot be considered independently. It is probable that in any event Oleg would have moved south; but it is unlikely that he would have moved so swiftly if the attack on Constantinople had not focused his attention so sharply on the importance of this region of the Russian Land. And this movement south gave Russia not only a new capital, it also removed the Varangians farther from their original home and thus made them more dependent upon the Russian Land for their whole wellbeing. The Varangians, by the very depth of their penetration into the country, became identified with the Rus—the Slavs to whom had been given their conquerors' name. Kiev was a keypoint from both the military and the commercial points of view—and, as it was to turn out, from the cultural and religious aspects as well.

## THE FIRST TILLERS

In the country round Kiev the Slav tribes were constantly harried by the peoples who commanded the greater part of the steppes country. These loose organisms, to whom the idea of nationhood and federation had not yet occurred, formed an easy prey to the marauders. The Varangian Kiev, able to speak to Byzantium itself on equal terms, provided a nucleus round which these tribes could condense. Historically it was not long before the majority of the Slavs had, voluntarily or involuntarily, made their submission to the new rulers; and in giving up their futile independence they acquired greater security and urged forward the development of a strong Russian state.

Seven hundred years later, Peter the Great transferred the capital of his empire from the heart of Great Russia—Moscow—to a new town he had built on Finnish marshes. He wanted his famous 'window looking out into Europe', for he realized that what his country needed was contact with the progressive ideas of the West. But in the time of Oleg and Igor, the West was unimportant. Russia had most to gain from contact with the great Greek Empire, and with the advancing Muslim nations of Asia Minor, the Black Sea, and south-eastern Europe. One finds here another of those patterns that recur so frequently in Russian history—the acceleration of development by a reorientation towards the outer world. It almost seems as if the Russian Land is so vast that unless it constantly stirs itself it perishes through the inertia of its own dead weight.



## MOTHER OF RUSSIA

**T**he Varangian colonies in North Russia, round Novgorod and Pskov, were older than those based on Kiev. Indeed, it is doubtful whether Rurik, the founder of the first Russian dynasty, ever saw the latter. But it is Kiev that claims, with justification, to be the Mother of Russian cities and even more so the Mother of Russia. From Novgorod and Pskov stemmed movements and ways of thought that, though driven underground, were in later years to play their part in determining the Russian character and Russian history. But it was Kiev that set the pattern of the Russian state-to-be; and from what happened there in the ninth century and immediately afterwards sprang the main destiny of Russia.

In the country round Kiev were the bulk of the Eastern Slav tribes. Among themselves they had achieved some sort of tribal organization, but they had, as yet, no idea of central authority and their only conception of nationality was the possession with their neighbours of a common speech, a common way of life, and a common pagan cult. In the steppe country round the homes of these tribes, fierce oriental peoples roamed, ever ready to descend on their weaker Slav neighbours and bear off the sturdy men and women as slaves.

Nothing was more natural, then, than that the arrival of the Northmen in Kiev and their establishment of ordered government there should provide a focus for the unorganized Slav peoples. To a large measure, force, the inevitable argument of the conqueror, brought the tribes into submission to the new central power. But it is clear that not a few of these peoples willingly placed themselves under the fresh and virile leadership. Here at last was a protector, a power that could deal justly with the raiding oriental peoples and even with such powerful outsiders as the Empire itself.

Somewhere about 880, Oleg and Igor, the successors of Rurik, had consolidated their power in Kiev. They had laid the tribes in tribute and, more than that, had let the outside world see that they were not only masters in their own house but prepared to stand up for their rights, no matter who the adversary might be. And it was not merely an odd freak of history that led these invading Northmen to settle

## MOTHER OF RUSSIA

their headquarters so far from their original home. At that time Kiev seemed to offer everything that could be desired by a people bent inexorably on establishing themselves in wealth and power. Here, in Kiev, they could make contact for war or trade with the Mohammedan peoples on the one hand and with Tsargrad, the great capital of the Roman-Greek Empire, on the other. The riches of the world were then, it seemed, to be found in the south and south-east. From Novgorod trade could be conducted with Scandinavia, but that was then of less account than the possibilities of establishing close relations with the Byzantine centre of the world.

So, in her very first days, Russia turned her eyes neither eastwards nor westwards, but to the south, to a city, Byzantium, which was already creating a culture that, deriving from both East and West, was unique and isolated. To that circumstance many events of Russian development may be traced—events that seem, to Western minds, either capricious or completely inexplicable.

Like all young and powerful barbarians, the new Rus, flushed with early successes, were not slow in turning covetous eyes on the fabulous riches of Byzantium. They made several bloody and formidable descents upon it, often coming very near to success in a venture that dominates Russian history—the capture of the capital of Eastern Christianity. And in between these forays, often carried out in considerable force and with that understanding of the use of boats which was the Northmen's birthright, the Varangian Grand Princes built up trade and commercial relations with Byzantium, the town that they called Tsargrad.

So, from as early as 907, the shape of future events began to form. Perhaps unconsciously, the new Russian state was drawing nearer and nearer to the Byzantine culture and opening its doors to the admittance of Byzantine theories. Like so many treaties made by all nations in later centuries, the most important and far-reaching of these trade agreements—that made in 912—was declared to be 'unshakable'. It was a declaration of eternal friendship, concord, and mutual interest. And like many a modern counterpart it was brought to an end by aggression. In 935, Igor once again descended, 'with one thousand war-boats', on Byzantium, and met with initial success, which might have continued but for an unexpected encounter with a Byzantine force, whose superior discipline and equipment soon drove the Rus back. In 944, Igor again attacked. This campaign was short-lived. The Byzantines had become alarmed at the strength and fierceness of the Russian attacks, which were carried out with a brutality and ruthlessness difficult to parallel even in the records of the Dark Ages, and opened negotiations for peace. The

## THE RUSSIANS

trade agreement was renewed. Favourable terms were accorded the Russians, to whom were assigned definite visiting times for their trade with Byzantium and who were made, for those periods, virtually freemen of the city. The chief and most valued commodity the Rus brought with them consisted of slaves. From this circumstance may be gathered the status of the subdued Slav peoples during these times of birth-pang of the Russian State.

This treaty endured longer than its predecessor and outlasted the reign of Igor, son of Rurik. Igor was succeeded by his son Svyatoslav, who gradually grew tired of Kiev and turned his eyes towards the richer lands of the south. He embarked upon a large-scale campaign, until by 970, the new Byzantine Emperor, John Tzimiskes, was faced with a major threat to his power and dominions. The Rus were sweeping all before them and rallying the subject Slav peoples of the Greek colonies to their cause. They sacked Philippopolis and rejected with the scorn they felt it deserved an imperial proclamation to return to their own dominions.

Now there was no mistaking their intentions. Their ambitions were set on taking Tsargrad itself. All through 971 they crept steadily nearer to their goal. But their enemy was skilful as well as powerful. He bided his time, and in 972 launched his attack. By a brilliant manœuvre he outflanked the advancing Russian armies, seized the passes through the Balkan mountains, and descended on Pereyaslavets, where Svyatoslav had set up his new capital. It was in the siege of this city that the Russians foreshadowed that desperate heroism which, in war, has become their outstanding characteristic. Eight thousand Rus defied the whole strength of the Byzantine armies, which did not succeed in reducing the city until the whole of the defenders had perished in the flames, which, with their own hands, they lighted to destroy the city.

Meanwhile Svyatoslav fell back with his main force across the Danube, where he encountered a Roman army. Once again a siege ensued. Once again the stubbornness of the defence proved more than a match for the attackers, overwhelming in numbers though they were. So the campaign went on, with a savagery on the side of the Rus that amazed even the Byzantine-Roman forces. Into the great funeral pyres that the Rus raised to cremate their many dead, they drove, as sacrifices to their brooding gods, the prisoners they had taken on the field of battle.

It was famine that eventually broke Svyatoslav's great effort. Military honours were at least even. If the Rus had failed in their first major encounter with a great power, they had failed brilliantly. And the success of their failure, to put it paradoxically, was due not

## MOTHER OF RUSSIA

only to the leadership of their Scandinavian overlords but also to the fanatical heroism of the Rus themselves, for whom no hardship was too severe, no sacrifice too great.

In this fierce and bloody war the Rus found themselves. They wrung uneasy admiration for their courage from a bitter enemy hardly less ruthless than themselves. And once again, in those far-off times, a thousand years ago, the future was foreshadowed. For it is related that the Rus and Varangian women threw themselves wholeheartedly into the combat, proving themselves warriors as skilful and as merciless as their men. If it had been decided by the spirit of the people, this campaign could have ended only in an overwhelming victory for the Rus. But it was superior equipment that turned the day. Not all the sacrificial heroism of the Rus—the product of their own forest-born toughness and the unbreakable spirit of their Northmen rulers, now mingling with them—could avail in the last resort against the heavy armoured cavalry of the Byzantines. The Russian infantry was unsurpassable, but found itself at last helpless against the weight of armour. Thus early the lesson of war, so familiar to-day, was being sketched out.

And the power of the Rus was virtually admitted by the Emperor in his treaty of peace. It was not the dictate of a conqueror to a completely vanquished people. Svyatoslav expressed his desire for everlasting peace with the 'great Greek emperors' and promised never again to attack their land, and enlisted his armies in support of the Emperor if the latter should need them. In return the Emperor re-established the favourable trade treaties and permitted the free departure of the Rus from his dominions.

It was true that this ended the disputes between the established power of the Empire and the growing power of the Rus. The Emperor, noted for his diplomatic skill—no less than his military skill in the field—seemed to have forgone all desire for revenge: an unusual frame of mind for the period. But this magnanimity is, in the belief of modern historians, only a sham. Not long after, the Pechenegs, a Turkish people establishing themselves in the steppes to the south of Kiev, attacked the Rus as they returned from the treaty-making. These marauders found a weakened and exhausted force, while they themselves were strong and fresh, and had, moreover, surprise on their side. They completely routed the remnants of the warriors that had so gallantly challenged the Empire. More than that, they killed Svyatoslav himself, and, says an ancient chronicler, 'gave his skull for a drinking-cup' to the nomad tribes. This treacherous assault is to-day believed to have been connived at, if not actually planned, by the Emperor John Tzimiskes.

## THE RUSSIANS

If Byzantium did not subdue its turbulent Rus neighbours by force of arms, it was to win something like subjection through the longer-drawn-out but perhaps more certain means of peaceful penetration. The crude Rus culture began to be permeated by Byzantine influences. It is said by tradition that Askold, the Varangian freebooter who first descended on Kiev, was converted to the Christian faith as the result of the foray he and his horde made on Tsargrad. But of this there is little historical evidence. It is known, however, that Byzantium's first awareness of the new Rus state as a power aroused almost at once a desire to win this pagan and virile people to the Faith.

Certain it is that the Emperor Basil I sent missionaries to Kiev in the time of Rurik, and Kiev itself is listed as a see of the Byzantine Church from the same time. Attestation of some of the early treaties was carried out separately by Varangian Christians, who preferred their own sacred oaths to those, perhaps more picturesque ones, of their pagan contemporaries. From the birth of the Rus dominion, therefore, the indirect influence of Byzantium, which was to grow and grow till it dominated not only Russian religion but also Russian politics, began.

Olga, the widow of the Grand Prince Igor, who virtually ruled on his death, herself visited Byzantium and was baptized. She was canonized—the first saint of the Rus—but she did little towards breaking the allegiance of her people to their own particular gods, in particular the sanguinary Perun, who demanded human sacrifice and whose worship created endless scandals among the Christian neighbours of the Rus.

It is the accepted truth that the Rus became Christian as an act of politics. Olga's place was taken by her son, Vladimir, who, in many ways, may be considered the consolidator of the Slavonic-Varangian dominions. There is nothing to show, in his early history, that he was attracted to the Eastern form of Christianity by any inner urge towards an ascetic morality. On the contrary, he followed the practice of his people in having two wives. He maintained in state at least three mistresses, whose status was little lower than that of the two wives. And, in addition, he kept up three large harems, housing no fewer than eight hundred concubines.<sup>1</sup> It was not, it seems, merely on account of his wisdom that a contemporary account describes him as 'another Solomon'.

He pushed out the Rus domain in all directions, forcing his way into Gallician Poland, foraging north and establishing suzerainty over parts of Livonia and Lithuania on the Baltic, and conquering

<sup>1</sup> Some accounts put the figure as high as 2,500.

## MOTHER OF RUSSIA

towns on the Sea of Azov. He renewed the war with Byzantium—though on a minor scale and with no threat to Tsargrad itself—by bringing under his rule several Graeco-Roman settlements on the shores of the Black Sea.

These events merely added impetus to the forward movement of the Rus towards integrated nationhood; and Vladimir, a clever and understanding counsellor, became aware that his people sought not only material prosperity but also satisfaction for their religious impulses. His first attempt to meet this need was a campaign to make the cult of Perun at once more lavish and more universal. A great statue to the god was set up on the banks of the Dnieper. It had a head of silver and a beard of gold. Before it great holocausts of sacrifice were made. But he did not succeed in his intention: Perun was the god of Kiev, as he was of Novgorod, but in other parts of the Russian Land, other gods, no less bloody and no less powerful, held sway. It seemed that this effort to set up one local deity above all the others might well tend to postpone that unity which Vladimir had decided was desirable.

It was then that he determined on his fateful course of investigating the religions of the world in order to find the ideal one for his people. Probably this is the only example in history of a ruler's trying to select a religion by a careful weighing of the claims of each. There was a wide choice, so it seemed to him. Along the Volga were the Black Bulgarians, frequent opponents in wars. Their valour in battle was largely the result of their fanatical Muslimism. On the western borders of his enlarged domains were nations that professed the Roman, or Western, form of Christianity. Other of his neighbours had become converted from their own ways to various forms of Judaism.

To a man of his tastes, Islam may well have seemed attractive, with its acceptance of polygamy. But it had one failing: the creed of the Faithful abjures wines. Vladimir would have none of it.

'My people', he observed, 'delight in drinking. They cannot accept a God that denies them their pleasure.'

His rejection of the claims of the Judaizers was no less discerning. 'Here is a people', he said, 'whose God deserted them and permitted them to be blown about the world like chaff before the wind. Do you wish', he asked the apologist, 'that that fate should befall us also?'

The Roman Christianity was no more satisfactory in his view. 'One drinks and eats always to the glory of God and not for the cause of pleasure. Such a strange creed was never even dreamt of by our forefathers and cannot be accepted by us.'

## THE RUSSIANS

It was natural that his thoughts should turn to the religion of Byzantium. For nearly a century his people had been in contact with the capital of the Eastern Empire. His mother Olga had embraced the faith. Many of his people had already accepted baptism at the hands of Byzantine priests. But he wished to make sure. A final summing-up had to be made. And he sent out a commission to report on the practices of the various creeds as seen in their own lands.

The report was picturesque and decisive. 'The Bulgars', it said, 'stand upright in their mosques. Then they bow, sit down, peer this way and that like men possessed, and there is no happiness among them, but only sorrow and a dreadful stench. The Germans have a multitude of ceremonies, which we do not understand. They have all things but glory. In Greece, all this was different. The Greeks worship their god with splendour, and we did not know, when we stood in their churches, whether we yet remained on earth or had already entered into heaven.'

Vladimir hesitated no longer. His country should be Christian—and Byzantine Christian at that. The words of his emissaries rang again in his ears: 'There is no such spectacle on earth, nor one of such beauty. It is beyond description. There, in Saint Sophia, God dwells among men.' If He could dwell among Greeks, no doubt He could dwell among the Rus, who had shown themselves the equal of the Greeks in many ways. And there can be no doubt that the solemn, ordered, colourful ritual of the Eastern Church must have appealed to that love of pomp and that belief in transcendental mystery, which are part of the Russian make-up.

In 987 Vladimir's mind was made up. Both he and his people were to become converts to Christianity. First of all, however, his own position must be made unassailable. He must move, at one bound, from the ranks of pagan barbarians to a place among the inner elect of the Church itself.

Using his new-won bases on the Black Sea, he pushed forward his armies into the Crimea and captured Kherson, one of the richest colonies of Byzantium. He offered to withdraw on one condition, and one condition only. The Emperor must give him in marriage the hand of a Byzantine Princess. Thus only could his right to convert his people be legitimized.

The attack and the offer were made with nice judgement. Byzantium was, at that period, nearing the height of its power. Its forces were large and well led by Basil II and his generals. The sway of the Empire was being extended in that last spirit of energy which preceded its slow and lingering death. If Basil II had chosen to call Vladimir's bluff, there could have been little doubt about the upshot.



## MOTHER OF RUSSIA

But the Emperor was engaged on war with the Bulgars. Vladimir offered him the conversion of the Rus, which would redound to the glory of Byzantium, and also—and more practically—the alliance of the Rus in the great wars.

So Basil lost no time in coming to terms. His own sister should marry this Rus Grand Prince, whose multitudinous unions could be at once set aside as unhallowed of God. Vladimir was baptized in Kherson and went immediately to the wedding ceremony. His grand gesture was the restoration of Kherson to the Empire 'as a wedding gift'. With his armies he withdrew to Kiev, where he at once began the creation of a 'new people', as he put it, by the forcible conversion of its inhabitants to the Faith of Byzantium.

His first public act was the degradation of the 'devil Perun'. The grand new image, with its silver head, was dragged down. Twelve stalwart men belaboured it with clubs. It was dragged at the horse's tail before suffering the final ignominy of being thrown into the river Dnieper, hitherto its sacred waterway. The lesser gods were not treated so severely; no doubt their inferiority made taking risks with them less dangerous. They were simply torn from their mountings and thrown into a huge bonfire.

So, with relentless fury, he signalized the passing of the old religion. He was symbolically purging, with fire and water, the old barbaric mistakes of the Russian Land. Then he issued his decree—simple, direct, pragmatical.

'Whoever he be', it ran, 'who will not come to the river tomorrow to be baptized, be he rich or poor, will fall into disgrace with me.'

The population of Kiev flocked to the river. And throughout the boundaries of this great barbaric city, where the word of Vladimir was law and the spears of his soldiers a sharp argument, the ancient gods were cast down, and the people plunged into the waters of consecration. Vladimir's enthusiasm for the new religion was unbounded. He built churches till Kiev became famous for them, and he sought to raise Kiev to a level it had never before attained. Throughout his domains the conversion of the people went on, until, by the end of his reign, the great principedom of Kiev was more or less fully admitted into the great brotherhood of Christian nations.

Often compared to King Alfred, because of his work for national union and for his raising of the standard of culture, Vladimir, who is called the 'Bright One' in folk-lore and in folk-songs that could be encountered in the Kiev region till quite recently, undoubtedly had the interests of his people close to his heart in all he did. But it



## THE RUSSIANS

is certain that he could have had no glimmering of the decisive nature of the course he pursued.

By his forging of the connection with the Eastern Church and the imposition of its creed upon a populace not in a position to protest, he had determined for many centuries the whole trend of Russian history. The Byzantine peaceful penetration had culminated in a victory, the effects of which were to last long after the Graeco-Roman Empire of the East had crumbled and proud Constantinople had become a Muslim capital.

For it was not merely the Eastern form of Christianity to which he pledged the infant Russian people. It was to all the associated civil ideas as well. The Tartars were to come and submerge the country for close on a couple of centuries, but their intrusion did not swamp the legacy of Byzantium. Some at least of the apparently oriental features of Russian life and Russian history, frequently ascribed to the Tartars, have their real origin in the teachings of Constantinople. At first this assimilation of Byzantine thought and outlook was unconscious, the natural imitation by a barbarous people of the culture to which they had assigned their destiny. Later, with the adoption of the policy of the Third Rome, the idea of Russia as the heir of Byzantium became consciously pursued. It was this, as will appear later, that served to keep alive many aspects of Byzantine civilization that otherwise would almost certainly have been killed during the long night of the Tartar occupation.

It has been asserted by a keen student of Russia that the significance of Vladimir's choice lay in its acceptance of the West in preference to the East. He points out<sup>1</sup> that the Arab culture of the time was immensely powerful, and that it can only have been by a hair's-breadth that Russia escaped coming under its complete influence. 'Vladimir chose Christianity', he wrote, 'and so set his face westward and linked the fortunes of the Russian State with those great forces and tendencies which have produced modern civilization.'

That is, perhaps, an overstatement. One of the most powerful consequences of the conversion was a severance with the West—or, rather, as contact with the West had barely been established, the creation of a barrier that in later years was to prove almost insurmountable till the rough giant's hands of Peter I started to tear it down. It led to the separation of the Rus from their western fellow Slavs—and particularly from the Poles, their near neighbours, with whom the conversion was the beginning of a long and embittered enmity; and it was to cut off Russia from the great vitalizing stream of the Renaissance.

<sup>1</sup> Harold W. Williams, *Russia of the Russians* (1914).

## MOTHER OF RUSSIA

It would be better to say that Vladimir's choice saved Russia from complete\*orientalization and this, indeed, in such a way that the country was able to escape the entire consequences of the Tartar invasion. And it was also a choice that laid the foundations of Russia's position as the Janus among nations. With one face Russia looks west, with the other, east. She has been unable ever to attach herself completely to either. She still takes elements, as she has always done, now from the East, now from the West, moulding them to her own pattern, which is the individual pattern of her own vast land, like to none other on the earth.

In his admirable *History of Europe*, H. A. L. Fisher describes Vladimir as 'a monster of cruelty and lust', and goes on to point out that this '... did not prevent his canonization as a saint'. But Vladimir was not entirely that: Fisher's later description of him as a 'capable barbarian' comes nearer to the truth. He was, as history shows, a strong, far-seeing man who, realizing that change was inevitable, set out to discover, on the facts available, if it were possible to guide that change along lines calculated to benefit his people. It would, no doubt, be extravagant to claim for him that he was a pioneer of the application of scientific method, however crude, to statecraft, but certainly he realized the magnitude of the decision he was making and spared no pains to ensure that, as far as he could foresee, the decision should be the right one. Cruel he was; it is impossible to deny it. In that he was the forerunner of many a Russian ruler and by no means different from potentates in the presumably more enlightened West. Lustful too he may have been; but lust is often only another facet of that power which marks great leaders; and the age he lived in, whether oriental or occidental, or something between the two, was not distinguished by asceticism. It is easy to detract from the character of an early leader such as Vladimir, but it is fairer to recognize the greatness of his achievements. It reflects neither on his wisdom nor on the acuteness of his vision that he could not see the uttermost limits to which his reform would lead. To be able to foresee the march of events in their entirety and to do something to mould them is as rare a gift among kings and princes as it is among democratic leaders and ordinary mortals. Man can conquer To-day and recapture Yesterday, but To-morrow always eludes him.

That Vladimir was made a saint and given the title of *Isapostolos*, which, shared with Constantine, ranked him with the Apostles, is only a part of this forceful leader's achievement. He went further than any of his predecessors in welding the great amorphousness of the Russian Land into an integrity. If he did not wholly succeed, this

was due partly to the overwhelming difficulties involved in keeping together so scattered a domain when transport was so primitive, and partly to the system, which Russia shared with the empire of Charlemagne, of dividing the country into appanages at the death of the ruler. Russia never, in fact, became a unity under Vladimir or any of his immediate successors up to the time of the Tartar invasion. It was more a federation, loosely connected through the person of the Grand Prince of Kiev. But Vladimir succeeded in giving greater weight and reality to the central authority than might have been considered possible; and he left behind sons who were hardly less capable than he had been.

Of these successors, Yaroslav is, perhaps, the best known and also the most dynamic. Once again under his leadership a near approach to unity among the Rus was attained. The confines of the Russian Land were expanded, and the relations with Byzantium were strengthened, but for a short war almost equally disastrous for both sides. Now at last under Yaroslav's direction, the oriental peoples began to feel the real power of the Rus and to respect their right to occupy the Russian Land.

Yaroslav has been surnamed the Lawmaker, and while it is true that he did much to stabilize custom into law, he did not do so much as has been popularly attributed to him. The Code so often associated with his name, thought actually much later in authorship, gives some interesting glimpses of Russian practices of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Private vengeance—the vendetta—was part and parcel of the law, as well as trial by battle and ordeal. And also—a circumstance to be noted by those who allege that freedom, justice, and equality are exotic plants on Russian soil—it recognized trial by jury and even went so far in anticipating later Western practice as to rank juries as representatives, for the duration of their function, of the Grand Prince. As might be expected, the whole Code is a child of Norse custom; for the rulers of the Russian Land, though approaching ever more closely to the Slav people, still carried with them their Scandinavian inheritance, just as the rulers of Norman origins did long after they had become merged with the English people and come to regard themselves as predominantly English.

It was not only in internal affairs that Yaroslav did so much to establish the reputation of his country: he won international recognition. His children married into the ruling houses of neighbouring states, including Poland, Norway, and Hungary. One daughter even married Henry I of France. His court was regarded as of equal status with those of other European monarchs. This was the first nexus between Russia and Europe, and it is interesting to speculate how

Russian history might have developed if later events had not broken the slender link that had then been formed. It was not until the time of Peter the Great that Russia was again to reach out her hand to Western Europe and claim a place among the community of civilized nations.

But Yaroslav was not greater than the system he represented. If he built up the Russian Land, expanded its trade, raised its prestige, gave it internal order, he did nothing to strike at the root of disunion. When he died, his possessions were divided among his successors. He neither set up a rule of succession nor, as did the later Grand Princes of Moscow, appointed a successor by will. It had been so when Vladimir died, but Yaroslav was capable enough to seize and retain his father's heritage. Circumstances were other on his death. The great disintegration began—a disintegration, with all the ingredients of civil war, rapine, and rebellion, that paved the way first for the fall of Kiev as centre of the Russian Land, and then for the Tartar invasion.

It would be tedious to follow this anarchy in all its petty details. But a sharp picture of its absurdity is given when it is said that, in the course of little more than a century and a half, the Russian Land suffered from no fewer than sixty-four principalities of some size and a plethora of minor ones, two hundred and ninety-three Grand Princes and rulers of various kinds, and as many as eighty-three civil wars, not counting minor insurrections and interstate feuds. Moreover, the oriental invaders whom Yaroslav had pushed back again became active. During the same period no fewer than forty-six invasions by the Turkish Kumans took place, and no small part of the Russian Land fell into alien hands.

Just as the Roman and Byzantine empires seemed to flower richly before settling into decay, so Kiev reasserted itself before its power passed. In the reign of Vladimir Monomakh, at the beginning of the twelfth century, Kiev seemed to be reasserting itself as the dominating force in the Russian Land and the centre of a unified state. Vladimir Monomakh, like his greater ancestral namesake, extended his dominions. More important, he brought many of the minor princes to heel and forced them to acknowledge his hegemony.

But this was the last flame springing from the dying embers. Vladimir Monomakh could challenge the great power of Novgorod, which, as we shall see, had marched boldly on towards independence in its own way. But his successors could not gainsay the power in the north. In 1169 Andrey Bogolyubski descended on the city and sacked it. This was the end of Kiev, of the first vain strivings to create a Russian nation, strong and unified under a single government.

All that Kiev stood for vanished: its trade, its culture, its power and might. It had lasted three centuries almost to the year, and it was destined to pass altogether from the Russian domains for many hundreds of years.

The glories of Old Kiev, the Mother of Russia, have often been told. Her churches and famous buildings, due to Vladimir the Great and Yaroslav, have often been described. The great pomp of the Court has provided the background for many a vivid piece of word-painting. But here in this book we are concerned with kings and princes, with rulers and ministers, only in so far as they affected the common people.

What was the life of the simple Rus like in that remote period? It is a difficult question to answer. Historians, mainly dependants of the Court, have left us accounts in all countries of the princes who were their masters. They rarely mention the ordinary people, and it is only by indirect evidence that we can obtain even a glimpse of their conditions.

The first thing to remember about the Kiev period is that it was only towards its close that there was any sort of identity between the Grand Princes and their people. Not till the end of Kiev was in sight could the ruling house be said to have been assimilated to the Slav race. The conditions were much as they were in England from 1066 onwards. There was the ruling caste, proud of its foreign extraction, following its own customs, preserving almost deliberately a way of life apart from the natives. And there were the ruled—simple, crude barbarians, little different from the patient, painstaking folk who had first hewed their way through the primeval Russian forest. It was the sheer dogged persistence of this people that succeeded in absorbing the Varangian element into the Russian mass.

These ruled people were slaves. They were not simply serfs, bound to the land and will of their masters as the later Russian peasants were. They were human merchandise—and, withal, the merchandise on which a large part of the prosperity of their rulers was based. The records of the time speak continuously of the sale of slaves not only to Byzantium, but also to the Muslims. Here we have a startling flash of light on the attitude of the Princes and their Court towards the people. The Rus had become Christian at the direction of Saint Vladimir. The Russian Land was a Christian state with its capital at holy Kiev. And it should have followed that each Rus had a soul. Yet the nobles saw nothing wrong in selling these souls to the infidels and thus sentencing them to eternal damnation.

Contemporary writers of the eleventh century speak of the Rus merchant in Byzantium as a slave-dealer first and foremost. It was

not merely that the sturdy Slavs made admirable work-machines. The dealers seemed to have them in unlimited supply. History is silent on the lives these unfortunate creatures lived, but there is no reason to believe that it was anything better than the life of beasts of the field.

Wealth was reckoned not in terms of land, as elsewhere, but in terms of slaves. Indeed, a man's right to land was based on his possession of the slave labour that toiled in it. Thus one of the principal themes of the everlasting Russian symphony is enunciated. The interdependence, in a peculiarly individual form, of land and labour, of producing power and man power, is stressed.

And as the nobles grew more powerful, so the slave motive developed. The petty slave-owner disappeared, to become himself a slave to a greater proprietor. The gap between wealth and poverty widened. As the luxury of the Court grew, as the power of the Princes increased, so the standards of the people deteriorated. It forms a striking, if unexpected, illustration of the thesis of the present rulers of Russia that he who owns the means of production owns the mechanism of power.

But the Russian people had their own mute way of protest. It was the same answer as they returned to the serf laws of later potentates. It was the reply of the Russian Land to the usurper. For the Russian Land is vast and it is easy to disappear into it. Slowly the migration began. It increased in speed. And as it increased, as more and more impoverished serfs trudged northwards to a place where greater freedom ruled, so the power of Kiev waned. It was thus that the power of Novgorod was established. And when Andrey Bogulubski sacked Kiev, he did so in virtue of the power that the Russian people had conferred upon him.

## FATHER OF FREEDOM

Even at the height of the power of the greatest princes of Kiev—of Saint Vladlmir, of Yaroslav, and of Vladimir Monomakh—the Russian Land had never become a single kingdom or even a closely knit association with a universally acknowledged head, such as the later Holy Roman Empire. This cannot be too frequently stressed if the Russian history of these times is to be understood and its later course seen in perspective. Kiev was *primus inter pares* because it was the centre of a large part of Russian prosperity, the focus of the Russian Orthodox religion, and the outlet of the Russian land to the wealth and culture of Byzantium. The Grand Princes of Kiev were not at any time autocrats in the sense of the later Moscovite Tsars. When the Grand Princes asserted their suzerainty, it was because, as the greatest merchants in the land, they had the means of doing so. The whole 'federation', if it can be so called, was a more or less accidental arrangement on which the forces of disruption were constantly at work and, in the end, proved stronger than the contrary centripetal attraction of Kiev—an attraction that quite early in European history might have fused the Russian Land into a real integration. The nearest it ever approached to this ideal was during the reign of Yaroslav.

So far from being without rivals, Kiev seemed to be always at war with some prince or princeling who felt himself strong enough to go his own way. These would-be competitors rose and fell, but they had neither the prestige nor the resources of Kiev, and whatever success they attained was only temporary. And there was one great rival that never came entirely under the dominion of the Grand Princes of Kiev. At worst it ranked itself equal to the capital; at best it considered itself superior.

This was Novgorod, actually, as we have seen, the oldest of Rus cities. It was here that Rurik and his nobles settled, and it was from Novgorod that the expeditions set out to bring Kiev into the orbit of the Rus power. Throughout the whole of the first period of Russian history, Novgorod was a sharp thorn in the side of Kiev. The distance separating the two cities was considerable, and in those days of inefficient transport—the Russian Land, as even to-day, relied



chiefly on its wonderful river system—constant subjugation by the central authority was impossible. Thus Novgorod was in a position to do very much as it liked. And its likes and dislikes were not only marked but very decisively expressed.

If Kiev is the Mother of the Russia, the author of much in Russian life that has survived even the October Revolution, Novgorod is the Father of Russian Freedom. The autocratic tradition of Russia came to the country from Kiev, which had, in turn, derived it from Byzantium along with the Orthodox religion. Novgorod, more remote from Byzantine influence and closer to the origins of the Norse invaders, built up and flourished under a system of democracy that impregnated Russian thought even during the darkest days of blind autocracy.

Thus it may be said with at least as much truth as usually attaches to generalizations that the Russian habit of obedience to authority sprang from Kiev, while that sturdy independence of thought which so many students of Russia have noted as an astonishing antithesis had its ultimate origins in Novgorod. In later days the autocratic tradition grew so strong that the river of freedom that had risen in Novgorod seemed to have been dammed. But it was underground, or rather overlaid by foreign matter. Throughout Russian history it welled up and swept aside the clogging accretions that were threatening its flow.

Novgorod, which lies about a hundred miles to the south-east of the site on which Peter was to build his capital, was something more than a city. It was a city state, claiming full independence and asserting it boldly when necessary. And it was fully conscious of its standing. In the old records it calls itself proudly *Gospodin Veliki Novgorod*, which may be rendered into English as 'Lord Novgorod the Great'. It had a spirit and sense of unity to which Kiev never attained. Novgorod was a unique phenomenon, which early showed the many-sidedness of the Rus character. If, but for the chance of history, Novgorod had prevailed, the whole course of Russian history might have been different. Russia, the champion of autocracy, might well have become instead the fount of freedom and the inspiration of European liberty.

In the ninth century, when Rurik made his capital in Novgorod, that chance—the chance of a free Russia—was nearly seized. But the wealth of Byzantium beckoned. It was not only wealth and culture that the Rus gained by their southward migration towards Tsargrad. They imported with these things what we should now call a new ideology, very different from that of the insurgent Norsemen or of the lawless nomad Slav tribes. It is not too much to say that the



price the Rus paid for part of the Graeco-Roman civilization was a right to freedom—a curious inversion of conventional ideas on this subject, though there is a parallel in the development of Western Europe during the Dark Ages.

There is more than independence of spirit that the Russians have inherited from Novgorod. This city state was the founder of Russian expansion. Kiev itself was, in a sense, first a colony of Novgorod. And the enterprising spirit of Rurik's Norsemen canalized the innate nomad tendencies of the subject Slavs. While the latter were seized—and still are—with a desire to escape ever to new spaces so soon as their immediate locality becomes intolerable or crowded, the Norsemen were urged to strike out into the unknown in search of plunder and wealth.

From the eleventh to the fifteenth century, Novgorod was not only a flourishing city but also the metropolis of a colonial empire that tended ever to grow. From Lapland to the Urals, and even in the more westerly parts of Siberia, the Novgorod power held sway. Even to-day the typical Novgorodian architecture may be seen throughout these northern tracts, lasting monuments both to the extent and to the thoroughness of the Novgorodian penetration.

Throughout its long history, Novgorod was always wedded to the republican ideal. When Kiev fell and the nominal connection with that city fractured, this democracy reached its fullest development. It was a real democracy. If it gave its elected ruler the title of 'Prince', that was simply in accord with the practice of the age, when the word had not become associated with one particular form of government based on hereditary principles. When Novgorod embraced the Christian faith, the Church played its part in moulding affairs, but without destroying the democratic basis. As the international trading prestige of the city increased, foreign influences became of some importance—but again without loss of essential freedom, which was always vigorously expressed.

Historians have seen in the Novgorod system of government a clear anticipation of the party method so familiar to British people. Elected though he was, the Prince could exercise power only by winning the support of certain interests, among which the Church and the mercantile class were the chief. Just as soon as he lost that support his power ended. Defeat in the Veche<sup>1</sup> was the end of him. He was, as the Russian phrase that probably dates from this period goes, 'shown the way out'. Unpopular princes were treated decisively. Often they were imprisoned. If a strong man able to command the support of the people could not be at once found, a succession of rulers

<sup>1</sup> The Veche may roughly be described as the elected national assembly.

was tried. They might last only a few months; and there was never any hesitation in bringing an unsatisfactory period of power to an abrupt close. And sometimes an expelled prince would be brought back from exile or imprisonment.

Novgorod was the one Rus city that never came completely under the dominion of the Tartars. Indeed, even when it was paying tribute to the Mongolian overlords, it still retained its own free spirit and produced some of its outstanding men. Such was the famous Alexander Nevski, whose control lasted for nearly a quarter of a century. Nevski threw back the invading Swedes, who had been taking advantage of Russia's weakness, and became one of the traditional Russian liberators to whom even the Bolsheviks pay tribute. Perhaps his greatest achievement, however, was to curb the fiery intransigence of his fellow. He persuaded them, in the light of stark facts, that to throw out the Swedes was one thing, to challenge the Tartars quite another. By coming to terms with the Mongols he saved for Russia much of a tradition that in the fullness of time was to benefit and enrich the country.

There is a sidelight on the utter independence of Novgorod in the career of this hero. He was undoubtedly the greatest man of his time, and the magnificence of his military victories was fully recognized. Yet even while these were still fresh, the Veche did not hesitate to 'show him the road' when, for a time, his policies displeased them. The Novgorodians were not prepared to relinquish the power of their elected assembly even to such a man as Nevski.

It is difficult to give a clear picture of the constitution of this free city. Like the unwritten British constitution, it seems to have been in a process of constant adaptation to new needs, and power tended to be transferred from one group, or its representative, to another. Thus, towards the end of Novgorod's greatness, the power of the princes appears to have passed to the mayor or governor. But there is one unvarying factor—the Church. Yet here again the last basis of the Church's power rested on popular opinion. The bishop was elected by the Veche, and the selected candidate was submitted to the Russian Metropolitan for approval. It might be that the latter would object. If so, his nominee was not likely to last long unless—as with the princes—his acts met with the approval of the people. By the thirteenth century, Novgorod had become an archbishopric; but that did not prevent the Novgorodians of the period from throwing their archbishop into exile. That was in 1211.

It seems a far cry from this sturdy democracy to the serfdom that so long tortured the Russian people, and it may seem on a cursory glance that this early assertion of the rights of the people was com-

pletely subdued by the Easternizing influences attributable to either the Tartar invasion or the Byzantine Church. But this view is entirely wrong. The spirit of Novgorod, as has already been pointed out, not only survived in its secret places but remained powerful enough to assert itself decisively when the time was opportune.

For Novgorodian democracy was the expression of a democratic feature of Slav life—a feature that has emerged unchanged after centuries of environmental change and may be seen to-day at work in the development of the Soviet Union. It is something which differentiates the Slav idea of popular choice from that of other countries. In Western Europe, freedom and democracy are often considered identical with the right of the majority to rule, and the right of the minority to express its disagreements. The Slav notion is something different. It is based on the principle which has been called ‘necessary unanimity’. The minority is not tolerated. The strong urge towards comradeship and communion, the bond between man and man, which mark the Slav outlook, insists that agreement must be complete and that dissenters must be antisocial. This was the principle that animated the Mir, for so long the sole mouthpiece of the common people in Russia. It is seen again in the implicit structure of the Russian Soviet State. It reappears in the workings of other Slav peoples—as, for example, the early Polish diets. And its strength and persistence account for the failure—the almost catastrophic failure—of all attempts in Russia to work parliamentary systems modelled on the party politics of the West and particularly of English pattern. It is an aspect of this trait, too, that leads to the Russian’s easy acceptance of autocracy in its worst forms. It is not simple to secure unanimity by democratic means; and autocracy can sometimes be tolerated as a short cut to that identity of viewpoint and action which the Slav sees as wholly necessary.

This principle of unanimity dominated the Novgorodian scene. There was no minority party in the Veche—the town assembly—for long. Those who thought differently from the prevailing faction were not allowed to speak their mind as they chose. A favourite method of dealing with recalcitrants was to hurl them from the Great Bridge. But often powerful minority factions set up their own Veche and challenged the authority of the legitimate one. The matter was cleared up according to the formula of the times by bloody conflict. In these disputes, the archbishop and the Church frequently found themselves in the position of arbitrator.

The importance of Kiev in Russian history is more that of an inlet valve than of an outlet one. It was through Kiev that Russia admitted Christianity and the civilizing culture of the Eastern

Empire. Through Kiev, too, came the goods of the greater part of the then civilized world. Just as, in Peter the Great's day, his city of Petersburg was built to provide the necessary window on to Europe, so from the ninth century onwards Kiev was Russia's vantage point for watching—and learning from—the march of history.

One may, therefore, if one chooses, think of Kiev's part in the drama of the Rus as more passive than active, of Kiev as the pupil rather than the teacher or experimenter. But not so Novgorod. Novgorod's whole existence depended on its positive activities. If foreign traders came to the town and had their own large quarter there, that was because they had goods to buy as well as to sell. In this period Novgorod was the pioneer of Russian culture and Russian colonization. Novgorod was above all else a trading centre. It was in search of new sources of goods for sale that her explorers pushed out into Siberia, the Far North, and the Urals, to found the Russian Empire. Her merchants brought Russia to the Western world. The Hanseatic merchants came from all parts of Europe to trade in Novgorod. There was a microcosm of the then-known trade world in that important part of the city—the largest in actual area—that was called the 'Commercial Side'.

Novgorod was a military power only spasmodically, as, for example, under Alexander Nevski. Its conquests were the peaceful and more lasting ones of trade. When the Novgorod pioneers settled in a place in remote Siberia, theirs was not the mere occupation of a military force. It was something permanent. And the result was that, while the boundaries of the Kiev power constantly varied as the tide of war ebbed and flowed, those of Novgorod expanded steadily. Later, this solid building gave great stability to the new Rus state. It may indeed be argued that the steady penetration of Novgorod's influence eastward saved large tracts of country and their people for the civilization of the West. Novgorod, like its remote successor Petersburg, was a link between the East and the West.

The Tartars never quite subdued Novgorod. Its boundless spirit and independence—above all, its shrewd business sense, which taught its inhabitants to make the best of a bad bargain rather than lose all—could not entirely submit to the Eastern yoke. It was left to a rival Russian power, a decisive one in Russian history—that of Moscow—finally to break this noble city-state and bring it within the confines of a greater and more integrated Russian nation.

From Kiev, then, came the tradition of the Russian despot, that figure round which all conventional history is written. But from Novgorod came, though in strangely transmuted forms, many of the strengths of the Russian people. Among them was the right that

## THE RUSSIANS

every Novgorodian regarded as sacred—the right to rebel and to resort to the uttermost measures to attain an end universally desired. Another was the tradition that a unanimous decision was its own justification, needing the endorsement of no higher appeal—a tradition that flourished even among the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century serfs, whose village communes had their own laws existing side by side with, and sometimes in direct contradiction of, the State laws.

It was the freedom of Novgorod that sapped the strength of Kiev. As the power of a few great slave owners grew in that city, so more and more smaller men fled to the freer, if more exacting, air of the northern rival. In the end, as we have seen, it was Novgorod that administered the *coup-de-grâce* to the failing first capital of the Russian Land.

So it was that a new power, a power that had not existed in the heyday of Kiev, crushed Novgorod. Moscow not only rolled back the Tartar blanket but also unified Russia by destroying the one nucleus round which a rival state might have developed. And in so doing Moscow not only fused together the Russian Land but brought, for all time, the Novgorod colonies of the north and east into the Russian sphere. That was in 1471. But meanwhile Russia was to suffer the Tartar invasion and dominance.

## Chapter 5

# THE EAST WIND

Midway between East and West, her people neither Europeans in Asia nor Asiatics in Europe but a subtle blend of both, Russia has, throughout her history, found herself torn between two different ways of life. Her destiny has been to blend the two modes into a greater synthesis, to strike down the barriers that have artificially grown up between the Orient and Occident and bring the two together—a destiny that is now being fulfilled on a more spectacular scale than ever before. It has been an uneasy task, and it is not surprising that at some periods the way of the East has triumphed and at others the way of the West.

There has never been a more complete domination of Russia by the East than during the age which lasted from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries. That was the period when the Tartars first hurled themselves out of the unknown east and later established themselves as unchallenged overlords of the greater part of the Russian Land. And it was during those two centuries or more that Russia first fulfilled the mission later to be entrusted her on more than one occasion: the saving of the West and all its civilization by her own capacity to suffer and endure.

As the Goths, the Vandals, and the Huns, had between them thrust up a new West by building again with the bricks of the disintegrating Roman Empire, so the Mongols, the Ta-tas or Tartars, had forged from scraps of the failing Chinese Empire a vaster and more powerful state. It was the greatest that had ever been seen in the Orient, and step by step it advanced. Its creation and expansion were the work of one of the greatest geniuses who have ever led an army—Chingiz Khan. He subdued state after state, tribe after tribe, till he could count among his peoples Turks and Huns, Mongols and Siberian nomads. His power dominated all that vast tract of land now known as Mongolia. He had subdued Manchuria and with it the bulk of northern China. He brought Turkestan under his sway. Like many another later conqueror he saw himself as the all-powerful, with the whole world as his divinely granted heritage. He went far towards realizing the megalomaniac ambition of his fantasy.

Steadily the vast tide of Mongol warriors flowed westward. Part of

Chingiz Khan's forces broke through the Caucasus and established themselves in the land of the Kumans. Thus they came to the borders of the Russian Land itself. The Kumans had long been a menace to the rulers of Kiev and their underlings. But the Tartars were a more formidable danger than they had ever faced. At first, the Rus were inclined to rejoice at the discomfiture of their hereditary foes, the Polovtsian Kumans. It was only later that they realized the same fate was to be theirs. The cry of the Kumans, as reported by a contemporary writer, has a familiar ring about it; it is the eternal warning of the victim of aggression to those who would pass by on the other side: 'They have taken our country to-day,' said the Kumans to the Rus, 'and to-morrow it will be yours they take.'

But this appeal was answered. Its force was felt. The cold breath from the east struck terror into the Rus. For once in their history the rulers of the Russian Land forgot their petty differences and joined together to make a stand against a common enemy they recognized as more deadly than any they had yet had to face. For the first time, too, they found themselves ranged in alliance with the Polovtsian peoples, whose Khan accepted the Christianity of the Eastern Church.

If the danger was seen in something like its true light, the temper and resources of the Tartars were not. Minor successes caused the Russian confederates to overestimate their strength. Their long experience of civil war had not taught them that moderation, no less than courage, is essential when dealing with a powerful and resolute foreign enemy. The Tartars—no doubt seeking, like all aggressors, to gain their ends at the cheapest cost—sent envoys to treat with the Rus princes. The deputation was received—but not for parley. Its entire membership was put to death; and there can be no doubt that the way of death was not easy.

Persisting in their defiance, the Rus armies, with their Kuman allies, advanced boldly to meet the invader, whose ruthless spirit was hardly likely to have been appeased by the murder of its embassy. And on the 31st of May 1224 occurred the decisive clash that was, as the oft-quoted phrase goes, 'to set back Russian progress for two centuries'. On that day, not far from the northern boundaries of the Sea of Azov, the armies met.

In any event there could have been little doubt of its upshot. But the complete victory the Tartars obtained was due not entirely to their own efforts. At the first encounter the Kumans panicked and fled. In their mad rush they disorganized the forces of their allies, who were completely unable to meet the savage onslaught. The result was rout. Relentlessly the Tartars pursued the Rus to the



banks of the Dnieper. The forces and the civil population were massacred, but for the captured princes a special fate was reserved. They were 'put under boards'. This refined form of execution meant that they had planks placed on them and were slowly suffocated by the weight of the Tartar chiefs as the latter caroused at supper. It was a first glimpse of what the Russian Land had to expect from these intruders.

As yet, however, there was no intention of occupation. The Tartars had destroyed their foe and avenged their murdered embassy. No doubt also they had made a careful survey of the wealth, actual and potential, of the Russian Land. Having reached the Dnieper, they withdrew. The Rus turned to the rebuilding of their land. But the end was not reached. Chingiz Khan had imbued his people with a desire for conquest and with a military machine that were long to outlive him. In 1227, three years after the assault on the Kuman-Rus alliance, he died. But in 1256 the second attack—more powerful, more terrible than before—was launched. It came not by the Caucasian route but by the territory now known as Kazan, then the home of the Black Bulgars, a Muslim people of whom only remnants survived the wholesale slaughter carried out by the Tartars. The invaders not only destroyed a people; they swept aside the whole of Russia's protection along the Volga. From that moment the submergence of the Russian Land beneath the Tartar flood became a reality; the Mongols poured into the country in untold numbers. Only one town was little more than splashed by the spray of this inexorable torrent. That town was Novgorod.

It was not the first time, nor was it to be the last, that the Russian Land was to save its people. For it was not serried ranks of warriors, nor was it the military genius of a Nevski, that held the Tartars in check. It was the dense, baffling woodlands that are the national garb of the Russian Land, the seemingly limitless marshes, and, above all, the incessant rain. Seventy miles from Novgorod, the Tartars admitted themselves defeated, not by any human foe, but by the natural defences that, whether it be against horseman or tank, spear or machine-gun, guard the heart of the Russian Land.

Nevski, as we have seen, played his part in saving Novgorod. It was salvation bought at the bitter price of submission, a price that, at first, the insurgent Novgorodians were ill prepared to pay. Nevski had shown himself a great and dashing general. It would have been more seemly if he had turned his gifts to the discomfiture of the invaders from the east as he had accomplished the downfall of those from the north-west. And perhaps it was this very fact that eventually led the Veche to accept the advice of their Prince. It was

impossible to accuse him of either cowardice or want of enterprise. His judgement and leadership were proved. Thus Novgorod submitted to the exacting burdens of taxation, the suzerainty of a foreign overlord—and a heathen overlord at that. Yet history has shown it to be a wise and well-judged move, one that saved for Russia the seed of that freedom which, in the long run, was to save her people.

Novgorod's decision was that of a business community used to weighing profit and loss and striking the balance. It may indeed be argued that her non-military tradition saved her, even if it led through the dark passage of humiliation. The choice of Kiev was otherwise. Kiev was a military power. In her glorious days she had challenged the mighty power of the Byzantine Empire and come to treat with the Greeks on equal terms. She was proud and would not pay tribute to the aggressors. And in refusing tribute she accepted tribulation. Kiev was sacked. The city of churches became a city of ruins, which, five years later, were still unreplaced. This was something more than an eclipse. It was final disaster. From that day Kiev has played no significant part in Russian history, except as a legend and a symbol.

Perhaps the choice of Kiev was the more glorious and the more noble. The policy of Novgorod might be dismissed as no higher than the chaffering level of market morality. Kiev was prepared to perish, and no doubt her rulers were well aware of the certain overthrow they invited. But this much may at least be said for the way of Novgorod. It did save, however uneasily and at however high a cost, something of the Russian spirit—and its most important part. Nor, when one views the action from another angle, is the path of Novgorod so very inglorious. The Novgorodians loved freedom at all costs. They were prepared to pay for its continuance, even on a limited scale, and to pay the utmost price. Yet the merits of these events are of little importance; what is of importance is that the Novgorodians saved something typically Rus from the hands of the destroying Tartars.

This time the Tartars did not pause in their mighty onward rush. They subdued the whole of the southern part of the Russian Land and passed on into Central Europe. It was only the Germanic nations that finally stopped them—and then only because the Tartars, tiring after their terrific conquests and embarrassed by the length of their rearward communications, turned their attention elsewhere. They fell upon China and Persia, where resistance was more stubborn. And having gained these prizes they did not revive their interest in the West.

## THE EAST WIND

The influence of the Tartar conquest of Russia has often been over-rated and many typical features of Russian life attributed to it quite without foundation. And the domination of the Tartars, or the Golden Horde, as they termed themselves, was never complete throughout the Russian land. The tide reached high-water mark in the mid-thirteenth century and almost at once began to ebb. The more westerly parts of the Land fell into the hands of other invaders, notably the Lithuanians. By the fourteenth century a comparatively small area of the Russian Land in its prime owed allegiance to the Mongol overlords, an area confined to the reaches of the middle and lower parts of the Volga, the Crimea, the basins of the Don and Donetz, and the steppe country beyond.

Even here, however, the Russian Land was not occupied territory. No Tartar 'new order' was imposed on the unhappy people. On the contrary, the principalities managed to retain a great deal of their individuality, and often the successors of the original ruling houses were able to continue in their office. Nevertheless, the Tartar hand was heavy, making ever-increasing demands on the toiling peoples. The Khan of the Golden Horde set up his headquarters on the Lower Volga, and thither the Russian princes had to proceed at frequent intervals to do homage—and, more important still, to bring the fruits of taxation. Moreover, every major act of state had to be confirmed, by personal petition of the local ruler, at the court of the Khan; and if the matter were very grave, appeal had to be made to the overlord of all the Tartars in Mongolia. There was never any opportunity of forgetting that the Rus had lost their freedom—a freedom they were not to regain, even in limited form, for centuries.

It was not only taxes that were levied on the Rus. Large and frequent demands were made for men and even trained armies. The Mongols used these drafts as they thought fit and did not hesitate to employ the levy from one principality to put down insurrection or disorder in its neighbour. Thus, any attempt at unity was nipped in the bud and what was virtually a state of civil war—the curse of the early Russian minor states and the chief barrier to their integration—was perpetuated.

Not always, however, were the Russian armed men used in fighting their own blood brothers. To the Mongols, the Rus were slaves to be disposed of at will. They served in campaigns in the most distant parts of the vast Tartar Empire. Equally, the Tartars used every means of assimilating the ruling families of the Rus states to themselves. The daughters of Rus princes were made the wives of Tartar nobles. Princes themselves were provided with Tartar consorts.

## THE RUSSIANS

Probably the Tartars sought thus to identify their own interests with those of the conquered in the cheapest possible way.

None the less, it must be again stressed that the Rus were permitted—though largely by default—to continue in something like their old way of life. Even if the permission of the Khan had to be obtained for the transaction of almost any significant state business, the fact remained that the Rus princes were not replaced wholesale by Tartar governors. There was, as one authority has put it, no effective Tartarization of the Russian people.

Perhaps it is not too much to say that the truth of the statement, 'the Tartar invasion cost Russia two centuries of progress', is based more on a negative fact than a positive one. The retardation of Russian progress arose principally from the fact that the Russian Land was artificially separated from the advancing west of Europe. The European side of Russian culture was thwarted and the fine promise of the reign of Yaroslav set at naught.

At the same time some of those features of Russian life which, down to quite recent time, emphasized the separation of Russia from the rest of Europe and tended to obscure the similarities, owe something at least to Tartar influence. But it is only in those particular spheres where the ground had been prepared by Byzantine influence. Thus the absolutism of the Moscow Tsars sprang from Tartar practice, but was also a continuation of the tradition of the great Byzantine emperors. Probably, too, the excessive cruelty of Russian punishment and the severity of Russian laws derive from the natural inclination of the princes to copy their Tartar overlords. But even here it is important to remember the practices even of free republican Novgorod. And the notion that the seclusion of Russian women into what were virtually harems until the time of Peter I was a Tartar legacy has been shown to be wrong. This is real Byzantium, for it is known from conclusive evidence that the Tartars did not segregate their womenfolk.

Tartar influences, then, accentuated already existing points of Russian custom, particularly those of Byzantium, which made a fetish of its orientalism. But distinctively Tartar customs rarely endured. The effects of the Tartar invasion may, indeed, be likened to some occluding substance spread over the open pores of the young Russian state—a substance that effectively barred the penetration of Western ideas. Thus, the Eastern element inherent in the Slavs through their association with Byzantium was, for a time, paramount. And it is this which must be recognized in the teeth of the tendency of so many apologists to explain away all dubious features of Russian history as arising from the Tartar infection.

## Chapter 6

# THE FOREST SEED

Kiev turned its eyes southwards and eastwards. Novgorod looked to the west and the north. Each failed to find in its peculiar orientation the inspiration that might have resulted in a unified Russian state. It was left to Moscow, standing symbolically midway between the two, to find the secret that had eluded its predecessors and establish Russia as a single country instead of a confederation of states. Later, she was to relinquish the task of Russian leadership to a new and more northerly rival, the construction of which was itself a symbol, until, in the fullness of time, her primacy was to return amid some of the most momentous years of all Russian history.

There was nothing in the early history of Moscow which suggested that here was a forest seed from which a great and enduring tree would spring. Exactly when the town was founded is not known for certain, but one of the earliest mentions of it occurred in 1147. Legend assigns to a Grand Duke of Rostov the honour of founding Moscow, after a mighty feast held in his country mansion where the Kremlin now stands. That was 1156, so it seems as though legend and fact do not here chime together.

In Moscow stood a church<sup>1</sup> known as the Church of the Saviour in the Wood, one of the oldest buildings in the capital. Its interest lies not only in its antiquity but also in its name, which give the clue to one of the secrets of Moscow's success. In the early days Moscow lay in the midst of pinewoods and dark forests, a typical settlement of the period when the wandering Rus were making their way along the broad rivers of the Russian Land and winning their birthright from the hold of the enduring trees. Moscow was relatively isolated from the chief centres of Rus development, and it could grow and gain strength with only occasional and minor interferences from the catastrophes and insurrections that beset both Kiev and Novgorod. Yet it was far from cut off from the commercial and cultural streams flowing along the great north-and-south river system of the Russian plains.

<sup>1</sup> This church was burnt to the ground during the Napoleonic invasion, rebuilt again, and finally demolished in 1931 to make room for the erection of the New Palace of the Soviets.

Indeed, Moscow was an important junction. It stood at a point where three main overland tracks converged; and along these passed the traffic between Novgorod and Kiev. Moreover, the Moskva, the river from which it took its name, was a vital link between the two main arteries of Russian trade—the Volga and the Oka. Thus standing apart from both the northern and the southern metropolis, Moscow was yet within the sphere of influence of both. Moreover, its rulers derived considerable wealth from exploiting their key position.

As time went on, Moscow became the centre of a district that attracted emigrants from all the Russian Land. There was, as we have seen, a growing influx from Kiev, as conditions for the people became less and less tolerable with the growth of the slave-owning power. Many of these emigrants came to swell the population and wealth of Moscow. At the same time, the enterprising Novgorodian traders, with their keen eye for profit, quickly saw the advantages of Moscow's position. They settled there and added commercial aptitude to the independence of the migrants from the south.

Almost unconsciously, Moscow thus became the centre of the part of the Rus to which the name of Great Russian was afterwards applied. In part this was due to the accident of position, though credit must be given to the pioneers—unknown like most true pioneers of Russian history—who first realized the potentialities of the site. But still more was due to the policy of the princes who directed the fortunes of the town till, in due season, they became masters of Russia. And not a little arose from the freedom from destruction and comparative peace enjoyed by the town in the woods even when the rest of Russia was being sacked and pillaged, now by Tartars from the east, now by invaders from the west.

This immunity was achieved by neither heroism nor skilful diplomacy on the part of the town. When the first Tartar thrust reached Moscow, the Muscovites remained neither to fight nor to parley. They fled into the dense woods and sought the safe shelter that the Russian Land has always offered to its people who throw themselves on its mercy. The town was occupied with no bloodshed and surprisingly little destruction. When the Lithuanians attacked from the west, the same inglorious abandonment again saved the city. In 1293, however, there was a Tartar sack of considerable magnitude. When it was over the Muscovites crept out from their hiding-places among the pines and the birches and re-established their town. For Moscow never lacked for citizens. It stood on the main road to the east, that road which has beckoned the wandering Russian people ever and ever onwards till at last they looked out over the Pacific and crossed into Alaska.



## THE FOREST SEED

In spite of these tactics, it is to the early rulers of Moscow that is due the chief credit for shaping the destiny of Russia's first imperial capital. Their policy was a skilful combination of avarice, business acumen, subservience, and independence. It was not for nothing that the Muscovite princes came from the line of Alexander Nevski, and the circumstance has a certain symbolism. For here in Moscow the twin forces of Novgorod and Kiev intermingled to bring forth that constructive power which neither could show by itself. Let all weight be given to the factors of position and immunity from attack, and the balance still drops quickly on the side of the rulers. Like Kiev and Novgorod, Moscow had its rivals, some, like Nizhni-Novgorod, with even greater natural advantages. Moscow triumphed over all, not at first by force of arms but by the determined policy of the princes.

Significantly, the first of the great Moscow rulers was known as Ivan Kalita, Ivan the Purser. In that cognomen the policy of his house is aptly summarized. If some other phrase were required to epitomize it, perhaps 'enlightened expediency' would best serve. For Ivan I initiated a policy of self-aggrandizement by ingratiating himself with his Tartar masters. Briefly, he farmed the taxes, thus keeping the Tartars at arm's length and giving himself time to build up his power.

Ivan I's policy, faithfully followed by his successors—at the worst unimaginative business men, at the best enlightened leaders—was eventually to break the chain of the Tartar enslavement. When the hour struck, his descendant was not only to free Moscow but to complete the ground-plan of the united Russia. Ivan himself put an end to the constant Tartar pillaging of the Russian Land, because his strict and methodical tax-collection and accountancy on the invaders' behalf made peace seem to them the more profitable course. But in achieving this respite from depredation he also laid the foundations of something still greater. The efficiency of his tax-gathering was due to his bringing, by skilful diplomacy, all the eastern Russian princes into a confederation. They accepted Ivan as central collector for their whole domains. Thus he took the first step towards establishing the supremacy of Moscow and eventually of consolidating the Russian Land. To the princes he was the representative of the Tartar power; to that power he was the representative of the Russian vassals. As this arrangement became stabilized so it led to more and more of the relations between conqueror and conquered being to some extent controlled by Ivan and his successors.

And he did more to turn the eyes of the Russian people towards the central power he was creating. He wooed the church. The metro-



politan Peter was one of his most frequent visitors, spending more time in Moscow than in his own metropolitan see of Vladimir, which had succeeded Kiev as the capital of Russian Orthodoxy. That this metropolitan should interest himself so closely in the building of the Uspenski Cathedral of the Kremlin and eventually transfer his throne to it was made to seem a natural accident by skilful and far-sighted preparation on Ivan's part. For the Church brought two things. It brought prestige and a definite capital status and primacy, at any rate in ecclesiastical affairs, to Moscow. And it brought wealth. For the Church was rich, and its material possessions were considerable.

Moreover the peculiarly intimate relations between Ruler of Moscow and Ruler of the Church caused some of the universal veneration of the latter to flow over on the former. The Prince of Moscow became the First Son of the Church. Moscow itself began to be regarded as a holy city. This, the second great step in the consolidation of Russia under Moscow, was the result not of chance, that frequent manipulator of the wires of history, but to the considered policy of Ivan I.

Yet these adroit moves were only incidental to the main point in Ivan's programme. He set out to show, and succeeded in showing, the other Russian princes that there was art in government, and that ability and clearheadedness were essential in state affairs. His gift of peace with the Tartars—reminiscent, in many ways, of the policy of Alexander Nevski, his ancestor—was, to them, miraculous. They tended more and more to rely upon the judgement of a man who could achieve so much and to focus upon him their hopes for the future.

This gradual recognition of Moscow as the centre of Russian policy was again the result of deliberate planning. There can be little doubt that Ivan saw his goals quite clearly, but he did not make the mistake of trying to force the pace. He knew that confidence sedulously nursed is far more lasting and sincere than the sudden conversion or the enforced agreement. He was a trader and a diplomat, and he did not feel the need of recourse to arms or compulsion. He believed in detail—as is shown by his will, in which not a single item of his large possessions is forgotten.

Even after Moscow had become the metropolitan see, the prestige of Vladimir, which had inherited such as was left of the glories of Kiev, continued. It was there that the Grand Prince was crowned, there that the ancient glories, faded and worn, still exercised a magic appeal. Neither Ivan nor his equally great successor, Dmitri Donskoi, sought to break this connection; and indeed a long line of Grand

## THE FOREST SEED

Princes was to be crowned in Vladimir before finally it yielded this last privilege, this last inheritance from Holy Kiev. Yet slowly the status of Vladimir was undermined. It gradually lost its independence and became the particular personal property of the Prince of Moscow, its cathedral and coronation hall his own private chapel. In all things the Muscovite princes believed in making haste slowly and in giving the appearance of inevitability to the things that they had consciously planned.

Yet for all this the results were not slow in coming. Ivan I reigned from 1528 to 1541; in his thirteen years of rule he accomplished more towards Russian unity than any prince since Yaroslav. By 1589, when his immediate successor Dmitri Donskoi died, all the Russian rulers of the east were looking on Moscow as their leader, adviser, and spokesman. In just over sixty years, therefore, Moscow had risen from a woodland trading settlement to the status of a capital town. And already there were indications of a still larger ambition. Under Dmitri the Church became infused with missionary fervour. Its monks struck out into the east and north. Stephen Permski went as far as the Kama and successfully established Orthodoxy there. It was the spearhead pointing at the heart of Siberia, and with Siberia at the heart of the Tartar dominion.

## Chapter 7

# VASSAL INTO EMPIRE

**M**odern Russia, the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics, is the direct descendant of the great Muscovite Empire. It has inherited a tradition that goes back to the fifteenth century, itself the legatee of an even older tradition, or rather two traditions: those of Kiev and Novgorod. And to the creation of the great Muscovite tradition three men above all made outstanding contributions. Each set the pattern of Russian life, the framework of Russian policy for an epoch; and it may be that a fourth is now unostentatiously at work bringing to Russia her rightful place in the vanguard of nations.

The first of this trio of creators was Ivan III—Ivan the Great. The second was Peter I—Peter the Great. And the third bore no titles, was given no cognomen; he was Lenin. Ivan is known to history and in the legends of Russia as the Gatherer or Reuniter of the Russian Land. The fame of Peter rests on his tempestuous drive to bring to Russia a new culture and a new outlook, to cast off the handicap of backwardness that the Tartars had bequeathed as their legacy. And to Lenin fell a task that was a combination of the work of both, for he brought together into a unity the fragments into which the Russian Land had been split by civil war and insurrection; and he gave it a culture and a civilization so far unique in the world.

To Ivan III, who reigned from 1462 to 1505, fell the labour and honour of completing the work begun by his notable forebear, Ivan I. When Ivan III came to it, the Russian Land was neither rich nor great. A not inconsiderable part of the original Slav lands had been drawn or forced into the orbit of the West, had accepted the Roman Catholic faith, and consequently erected a barrier between themselves and their Russian kinsfolk that even now has not been completely broken down. Though skilful exploitation of opportunity and the forces of natural decay had enabled Ivan's predecessors to lighten the Tartar yoke, it still existed in fact as a material drag and a moral humiliation to the Russian states, over which Moscow had established its ascendancy. Russia, or rather the confederation that looked to Moscow for leadership, then little larger in extent than the Poland of 1939, was indeed a minor power of much less account than her immediate neighbours, Poland and Lithuania, which, working

in close alliance, cemented by intermarriage of the ruling houses, had been for many years encroaching upon and despoiling the true Russian Land.

But the tide was on the turn. Under the Muscovite Grand Princes the Russians had been acquiring what they had never possessed before: a conception of nationhood. And as it grew, so their self-confidence hardened. The people that had so meekly accepted first the domination of the Varangians and then the overlordship of the Tartars began, for the first time, to see its destiny and to feel the call of greatness.

Ivan III directed the affairs of Moscow for over forty years; and in those four decades the whole situation of his domain was changed. He broke finally the relaxing Tartar grip, and the long tale of taxation and indignity was closed decisively. He gathered together the scattered Rus states and combined them into a nation that accepted Moscow not as *primus inter pares* as Kiev had been, but as a true capital, controlling the affairs of the state as a whole and speaking for it in no uncertain voice in international affairs. He thrust forward the influence of the Orthodox Church, his greatest success in this direction being the retention of Novgorod for the Eastern creed. And he started in earnest the real organized colonization of the Asiatic parts of the Russian Land.

This Grand Prince was a man of vision and enterprise who anticipated many of the points of policy that were to make the reign of Peter the Great memorable. Not least was his realization that Russia not only could but should learn from the West. While his armies were thrusting eastwards and delivering blow after blow on the remnants of the once invincible Tartar power, Ivan did all he could to foster relations with the West. In particular, he endeavoured to import Western talent, not only as an aid in the wars of conquest and liberation on which he engaged but also as a guide in the humanities and the arts. He succeeded in establishing firm relations with the West both culturally and diplomatically. With that achievement, the Muscovite Empire may be said to have come into being.

It is not the purpose here to enter into details of his various campaigns and of his gradual unification of Russia. What is more important is his influence on Russian life and on the people. In some ways his policies had beneficial results which, if followed up, might have changed the course of Russian history. And in that respect he is like so many Russian rulers both before and after him. Not only was opportunity placed in his hands. He gave signs that he recognized it for what it was. Then, in pursuit of some unattainable ideal, he let fall the reality and chased the shadow.

Ivan's immediate aim was quite clear, both to the people of his time and to the students of later days. He wished to become the Sovereign of All Russia; and indeed he was already calling himself Tsar, though he did not adopt it as his official title. Till then the word Tsar had been reserved almost exclusively for the Byzantine Emperor and for the grand Tartar overlord. His energetic measures, which trebled the area of the Russian domain in forty years, went a long way towards realizing this immediate aim.

It might have gone further if he had pursued as energetically his policy of linking up with the West. If he had done so, much of Peter I's subsequent work might have been unnecessary. But, having shown his understanding of the value of Western contacts, he seems to have forgotten them in dreaming a dream that was to haunt Russia as a nightmare for centuries to come.

He had called himself Tsar—the title of the Byzantine Emperor who was also head of the Orthodox community. And the adoption of this style was not altogether adventitious. For Ivan saw himself as the true successor of the Byzantine Caesars, the natural presiding authority of the Orthodox. History flattered him. He was contemporary with the fall of Byzantium and the crash of the Eastern Throne. Like Vladimir, he wished to make his claim secure; and again like Vladimir he married into the Byzantine Royal House. In 1472 he took as consort Sophia Palailogos, the daughter of the last occupant of the Greek Imperial Throne.

Thus it appeared to him that destiny was putting the right of succession into his hands. His was the one great political body left that professed Orthodoxy. By his side was the true representative of the Byzantine emperors. And God had blessed his cause by giving unto him victories and successes beyond the measure of his predecessors.

He imagined himself the Elect. And he founded a legend which, only a few years after his death, had already found expression in a phrase that was to recur again and again as Russia's story unfolded.

Moscow was the fountain-head of Orthodoxy. Moscow was, by Divine right, the successor of Byzantium. Moscow was the Third Rome.

The Third Rome. It was a golden ideal that was to become a curse, an aspiration that was to drag down the country that believed it. It stultified progress. It rose as an impalpable yet impassable barrier in the paths of reform—and did so till modern times.

And Ivan III, Ivan the Great, who gave so much to Russia—peace, prosperity, equality with her neighbours, independence, unity, and colonial expansion—gave also, as an offshoot of his

Byzantine dream, the theory of absolute personal rule. Even in the sixteenth century, during the reign of Vasili III, Ivan III's son, the Viennese ambassador could find cause for astonishment in the absolute power of the Muscovite Prince. No other ruler in the world had a power so complete over his subjects of all grades. No other ruler had fused into so powerful a combination the twin arms of the secular and religious powers. 'The will of the Tsar', it was said, 'is the Will of God, and of the Will of God the Tsar is the fulfiller.' More than the Pope at the height of his power, the Tsar was God's Viceregent on Earth. His lightest decree was a divine order. Ivan the Great, Ivan the Unifier, broke the Tartar overlordship, yet of his own free will called in the dead spirit of Byzantium, to which he gave a new and more powerful life. For this alone he must be regarded as one of the decisive figures in Russian history.

The success of the Muscovite Grand Princes was undoubtedly due very largely to their personal competence, which, in men like Ivan the Purser and Ivan the Great, sometimes touched the fringes of political genius. But Moscow's continued success came of something that had never been achieved by Kiev or Novgorod. That was a policy steadily maintained, which gave to Russia for the first time a feeling of stability. Kiev might have gone almost as far as Ivan the Great in bringing together under one leadership the Russian Land—for example, under Yaroslav. But on Yaroslav's death the coalescence dispersed.

It would be easy, however, to overrate this settled policy, for though it had a high degree of continuity when seen against the background of Russian history, it still suffered from various disruptive forces—the very same as had so much troubled Kiev and prevented it from ever becoming the real central authority of the Old Russia. The Muscovite Grand Princes had followed in the tradition of their predecessors and regarded their domain as their own personal property. Thus, one of the reasons for the rise of Moscow was the skill of the house of Ivan Kalita as estate managers. And this attitude was to become a serious block in the path of progress, for it still stood between the Russian state and the realization of true nationhood. Not even the acceptance of Moscow as a capital able to treat on equal terms with foreign countries altered this state of affairs. Despite their often sharp political acumen, the Moscow Grand Princes were fundamentally land owners and business men, and the whole of their course of policy suffered from the defects of their peculiar outlook as well as deriving strength from its virtues.

There was, then, in the old Muscovite state of this period no latent political philosophy other than that of the land owner to do as he wills

## THE RUSSIANS

with his own. No attempt was made to construct a constitution and there is nothing in early Russian history that parallels even for a short way such early English definitions of government as the various Statutes of Westminster of the Plantagenet periods. The very ability of the Grand Princes tended to disguise this weakness, which revealed itself only later and nearly brought disaster on the country.

And, of course, the old disruptive tendencies that had done so much to hinder Russian progress towards unity—as well as contributing to the expansion of the Russian Land on the more positive side—were still existent. The creation of central government could not curb either the Russian's urge to migrate or 'scatter', as he himself terms it, or his ingrained belief that the affairs of this life have no permanence. Migrations went on, and the political sense of the people was either absent or indifferent.

Yet Moscow could offer one great corrective to this centrifugal tendency: religion. Moscow was the Third Rome, the focus of the Orthodox religion, the fortress of Christianity against the pagan barbarians of the south and east and the heretics of the west. It was unity of faith rather than unity of nationhood that bound the Russian people to Moscow in the early days, and the reality of this conception persisted until the present century. It brought also the return of some of the Russian Land to the Muscovite Empire. In the west, Poles and Lithuanians—the latter only recently converted to Christianity from their pagan rites, the last surviving in Europe—had not only conquered much territory but had been actively proselytizing on behalf of the Roman faith. Large blocks of the people, particularly the so-called Little Russians in Ukraine or borderland, were converted to the new influence. Others remained true to their old allegiance, and when Moscow advanced its claim to be the Third Rome and moreover showed ability to enforce her wishes, not a few of the old smaller principalities placed themselves under the aegis of the new power. Thus Ivan's gathering of the Russian Land was not merely racial but also religious, a circumstance that lent it additional strength.

Under Vasili III, successor of Ivan the Great, the absolutism of the rulers was never questioned. This was perhaps the only era in Russian history when the claim of the Tsars to be supreme and unquestionable disposers of their people's destiny went entirely unquestioned. It is not surprising therefore that Ivan III and Vasili III, probably the two most able rulers of this period, failed to see any need of change in a system that appeared to work extremely well and undoubtedly with maximum profit and advantage to themselves.



The free tradition of Novgorod was not dead. But it was a period when the essential pragmatism of the Russian rose to the surface. The country, from noble to peasant, prelate to village priest, wanted unity and peace. Autocracy in its most unfettered form provided it. This was not to be the last time in either Russian or European history that the weariness of a people was to give rise to dictatorship in the cause of present benefit and future disaster.

Vasili III carried the autocratic tendencies of his father still further. He largely dispensed with the customary formality of consulting the council of boyars before taking important decisions. Under Vasili the practice succeeded, but it had in it the germ of destruction—a germ that very nearly caused the collapse of the Muscovite Empire. The boyars refused to see themselves as subjects of the Tsar, whom in past days they had elected. The Tsar took the attitude of the estate owner that those who lived by his bounty must do as he wished. The conflict was already recognized even in Vasili's reign, which ended in 1533, but no constructive effort was made to find a solution for the problem.

And, as in old Kiev, the question of succession was never placed on a satisfactory footing. The Grand Prince could, in his view, dispose of his estate in whatever manner he wished. That the people had some interest in the matter either did not occur to him or was regarded as a minor issue; servants do not influence the choice of the master. Vasili himself owed his inheritance, not to his primogeniture, but to an alteration in the will of his father, who had named him as successor to the grand dukedom in preference to the elder son by a former wife who had originally been selected.

The tendency to regard the times of Ivan III and Vasili III as some sort of a golden age of Muscovy—despite its patent barbarities and its constantly recurring cruelties—is based on an illusion. The general contentment was only superficial. It was arrived at only because neither the tsars nor the boyars were prepared to face facts and compose their differences according to a formula that acknowledged, in addition to the priority of their own personal right, the claims of the people whom they ruled. By the end of Vasili's twenty-eight-year reign the catastrophe was approaching; and Vasili himself had already done something to forfeit his standing by persuading the metropolitan to sanction a divorce from the childless wife to whom he had been married for twenty-three years, so that he might wed the daughter of a Little Russian family that had connections with the Tartars. From this union sprang Ivan IV, who succeeded him.

Ivan IV is the best-known of the early Russian rulers. His life has

was the establishment of a greater oppression exercised by himself. The swords and spears of his *oprichina* struck deep and festering wounds into the body of Muscovy, wounds with a poison which was not to be eradicated for centuries, if indeed it has even now been wholly purged away.

The tale of Ivan's massacres and murders is incredible. He is seen slaughtering wholesale the inhabitants of Novgorod, for no other reason than that their ancestors treated his own with scant respect. He butchered his subjects, tortured them, used them as fuel to feed the fires of the flame of his own barbarism. It is not uncharacteristic that he ended his life in a devoutly religious frame of mind, assuming the habit of a monk. But even his religion was tinged with his own love of despotism, abasement, and obscenity. It was marked by innumerable prostrations and humiliations. It was stern and unrelenting, and every now and again burst forth into orgies of the most fantastic kind.

But before he reached this stage, his own hand had been his nemesis. Personally he had murdered his own son, striking him down, and with that act killing not only his son but also the House of Rurik, which had reigned in Russia since the ninth century. Ivan was not actually the last of his line, for another of his sons for a brief time occupied the throne of Moscow. But he was the last one of any historical importance.

Ivan the Terrible has many more and juster claims to historical recognition than the mere fact of his belonging to the not inconsiderable class of ruler-psychopaths. Russia did undoubtedly make progress under his rule, for his period of energy was directed by a fertile and active mind that saw clearly the directions in which his country should move. The 'scattering' of the Russians continued, and it was during Ivan's reign that the foundations of Russian power were laid in Siberia, now known to be one of the richest countries in the world. It was at this period, too, that English sailors were attempting to navigate the North-eastern Passage and were thus brought into contact with the Russian people, to form trading associations that lasted until the Revolution of 1917.

Madman Ivan may have been, as has often been suggested. Certainly he was psychologically warped and abnormal. But for all that he had the sparks of genius that so often scatter from the fires that burn in the souls of these afflicted, and those sparks illumined with a new light the scene of Muscovy.

With the close of Ivan the Terrible's reign the long march of Moscow from a state of vassalage to the status of metropolis of both an empire and a religion may be said to be complete. The middle

## VASSAL INTO EMPIRE

period of Russian history draws to a close, though the beginning of the modern phase is not to come for some time yet.

Ivan's son, Ivan, nominated to the throne in the Tsar's will according to custom, had died by his father's hand, the victim of a violent temper that had, on this occasion, taken exception to the dress of his son's wife. On Ivan IV's death, therefore, the usual routine of succession broke down, and Theodore, son of Anastasia Romanovna, was invited to ascend the throne. His reign was notable principally for the regency of Boris Godunov, who was actually elected Tsar on Theodore's death in 1598. That date was a significant one in Russian history, for it inaugurated the period that has become known as the Time of Troubles, when chaos, disaffection, and disaster seemed to threaten the whole of the edifice that had been so laboriously erected by the Muscovite princes.

Truly it must have appeared to many that the House of Rurik, surging into the country at the head of the Varangian hordes, had brought prosperity and unity to the Rus, and that with the passing of that house, all these benefits were to disappear.

Russia, brought at last to greatness, stood on the eve of one of those periods of tribulation which beset her whole history. It was the darkness before the dawn that Peter was to bring.

## THE RISE OF THE ROMANOVS

**T**he legacy of Ivan the Terrible to the Muscovy that his predecessors had so laboriously established was the Time of Troubles. But the Time of Troubles was not entirely of his making. A country that had endured uncomplainingly the centuries of Tartar overlordship, with all its attendant barbarism, would hardly have been stung to revolt or revolution by one monarch who was somewhat more bloodthirsty than the rest. The Time of Troubles was the end-product of a long reaction that had been going on ever since the days of Ivan Kalita. The elements of property-owning Tsar and boyars who thought themselves not subjects but associates had never properly combined. At best they had formed an uneasy coalescence. The years of misrule by the boyar families during Ivan's minority and by Ivan himself after his brief early promise of greatness were the last points of friction that caused an already chafed and overtaut string to snap.

Boris Godunov did not grasp the opportunity given him—an opportunity that a man of keener political consciousness might have grasped. When his regency ended he became, by methods best known to himself, Tsar, nominally elected by a representative assembly. But he was of Tartar descent. The rule of fear was in his blood. Once secure in his position, he cast aside all pretence of being responsible to the people, or even to the boyars, and inaugurated a reign of terror no less horrifying than that of Ivan the Terrible.

It is quite true that Boris Godunov was in many ways one of the more enlightened of Russia's rulers and Tsars. It is true also that during a famine in the country, owing to the failure of the crop, he allowed the starving people of Moscow to feed by his own granaries, yet he did not hesitate to put to death these very people when they became unruly and inquisitive. When they clamoured for more bread and more humane treatment at the public works that Boris Godunov had himself organized, they were beaten and mutilated by the henchmen of his secret police.

Boris Godunov lived in perpetual fear of the obstinate boyars, who resented this eminence for one of his low Tartar descent, the son of an ordinary noble and not of a princely family. He might, had he been more of a diplomat, have brought the throne and the boyars

## THE RISE OF THE ROMANOVs

together. The boyars themselves might have insisted on safeguards as the price of his election. But neither side had any sense of political responsibility; both were motivated only by the desire for power and gain. It is possible now, in the perspective of history, to see that the hope of Boris to found a new dynasty was foredoomed to failure. He had no constructive ideas and sought only to perpetuate the position of the Tsar as the dominant property owner of the State. One contribution, and one only, he made to the pattern of Russian life. He established on an organized footing a secret police; and this feature of administration has remained down to the present day. If the idea was not new—Ivan the Terrible had his *oprichina*—Boris developed it as part of the policy of government; and so it has remained.

The reign of Boris was unhappy. It was the precursor of deeper unhappiness for the Russian Land. He was followed by the first false Dmitri, purporting to be a son of Ivan the Terrible, and backed by King Sigismund of Poland. Pseudo-Dmitri I had a short reign and was at last murdered, to be succeeded by a usurper, Vasili Shuisky, the head of a powerful boyar family, who camouflaged his seizure of power by a mock election. The Poles, now playing a powerful part in Moscow intrigue, saw to it that Vasili was soon deposed. Now came the second false Dmitri, known significantly as the Robber of Tushino. Dmitri II was weak, a mere plaything of certain boyars, and he strove, as many later Tsars were to do, to impose his rule by the help of the Cossacks. Oppression and anarchy ran riot.

The central government of Moscow seemed at this point to have passed for ever, and the elaborate system built up by the Muscovite princes appeared to be dissolving into the rule of petty tyrants from which the Russian Land had been so painfully and painstakingly rescued. Popular conditions were, as we shall see, deplorable at this time. But without the restraining influence of even a strong personal central government they now became intolerable.

Round the frontiers of the Russian Land there have always been other powers ready to swoop and take what they can. Now was their golden opportunity. Foreign invaders poured in on every hand. The Swedes swept in and captured Novgorod. Outlying provinces fell into the hands of nomad and oriental tribes. Worst of all, the Poles marched across the country and occupied Moscow. They now took by force of arms what they had striven, with only partial success, to secure by intrigue and political meddling.

Even at this time of catastrophe the boyars failed entirely to rise to the occasion. In the face of these many disasters, they might have sunk their petty differences and acted as the focal point round which the national spirit might gather. But they thought then, as they

## THE RUSSIANS

always did, of their own self-interest. They had imbibed the lesson of Moscow's policy of diplomatic appeasement without the far-seeing constructiveness of, say, Ivan the Great. And they did not forget their own personal feuds among themselves. The false Dmitri II found himself surrounded by numbers of boyars who saw in him a ready tool for carving their own fortunes out of the chaos. No less numerous were the boyars who, forgetting all insults, professed themselves supporters of the Tsar Wladislav, a son of the Polish king, who had been nominally installed on the throne of Moscow.

These boyars showed their entire absence of patriotism. No-one with any pride of country could have made common cause with invaders who had let slip no opportunity of humiliating everything Russian. They had not merely occupied Moscow and appointed a puppet ruler. They had massacred the people of Moscow for their own amusement. They had derided the claim of Moscow to be the Third Rome and had publicly mocked the Orthodox faith. They had done everything and anything to show that their rule must inevitably lead to the destruction of all characteristically Russian.

Moscow was helpless. The people, already downtrodden by their own rulers—the Tsars and the boyars—had no spirit to dispute matters with the foreign invader. Those who had been regarded as the natural leaders had either deserted to the enemy or joined a nominal ruler outside the capital. The darkest hour had been reached; and it seemed to be without any promise of dawn.

And in the upshot it was a man of the people who rose to the defence of the country. In Nizhni-Novgorod was a butcher, by name Minin, in whom burnt something of the intransigent spirit of freedom of that greater Novgorod from which his own town had derived its name. He uttered a fervent and moving appeal to the people and to those rulers who still hesitated to desert their country completely. The people rose. A Prince Pozharski placed himself at the head of a hurriedly formed and armed militia and set out to engage the enemy.

This was probably the first popular rising in Russian history. It showed that, within the hearts of the people themselves, the proud independence of Novgorod the Great still had its place, and that autocracy could not completely eradicate it. For though it was a prince who took charge of affairs, it was a butcher who made the first appeal. And it was the sudden, burning uprush of the popular spirit that made the prince's venture possible. And it is to be noted that the Prince Pozharski bore no name famous in the annals of the boyars. The nobles and gentry who supported him were countrymen of little account in the troubled intrigues of the capital. It was

## THE RISE OF THE ROMANOV'S

through butcher and obscure princeling that the voice of the people spoke.

What chance this militia might have had against the well-organized Polish troops, if left to itself, cannot be known; it would seem to be very slender. But it was not alone. The Orthodox Church was rallying the spirit of the people on its own account. Stung and humiliated by the behaviour of the heretics from the West, seeing its own existence threatened by the fall of the Third Rome into foreign hands, it threw all its vast moral and material resources into the fight. The Archimandrite Dionysius, who had been unofficially acknowledged head of the Church after the murder of the Patriarch Hermogen by the Poles, sent out missions in all directions, calling for national unity and resistance against the foreign invaders.

It was one of these missions that, in the first place, stirred the spirit of freedom in the butcher Minin. But he was clearly marked out, in any event, to be a national leader. If he gave the actual command of the militia to Prince Pozharski, it was because he realized that military affairs were better left in the hands of a professional soldier. For the rest he remained in control, organizing levies of men and money, raising the spirit of resistance, and obtaining equipment.

The Cossacks, that curious and fierce people ever on the search for loot and profit, had already taken a hand in affairs. When the Nizhni-Novgorod militia arrived at Yaroslavl, the Cossacks were already besieging the Poles in the Kremlin. A large Polish force was on its way to relieve its compatriots and urgent entreaties were sent to the forces of freedom to hasten to the scene of war.

They pressed forward, making as good progress as they could through the forest, and when at last they came within sight of Moscow the siege had not been raised. But the disunity, the petty jealousies, the mistrust, which have so often been a source of trouble in Russian history, now reasserted themselves. To many of the Russians, the Cossacks were hardly less distasteful than the Poles, and the idea of fighting side by side with them as allies seemed impossible. It was at this juncture that the leadership of Minin showed its quality. He made yet another appeal for unity, working on the firm foundations that the Church had laid. He treated with the Cossack leaders and dispelled the suspicions not unnaturally harboured by them. And, in the result, the joint force fell on the Polish army of relief and scattered it.

Now the siege was resumed. But in October 1612 part of Moscow fell to the Cossacks, and a little later the Kremlin force, now reduced to starvation, surrendered to the militia.

The first step had been taken on the road to freedom. It might



well have been a decisive one. But the national uprising had come from a pressing sense of danger, and the sudden show of spirit, the reaction to the troubles of the times, had not conferred vision or political understanding on the people. On the contrary, the national militia, financed by the minor nobility and bourgeoisie and led by irregular soldiers of fortune, had no experience whatsoever of government. The opportunity of consolidating the power of the people so that the former state of affairs could not recur was not so much ignored as unrealized. The invader had been thrown out and the destiny of Muscovy was again in its own hands. That was the one salient point. The implications were not seen, nor was there any thought concerning the true destiny of the state.

In the main, then, it is true to say that the resurgence headed by Minin did little more than restore the *status quo*. Arrangements were made for the election of a Tsar. But something at least had been won. The people had to some extent felt that the ultimate power rested in them. The germ of political self-consciousness had been fertilized. This showed itself principally in the careful arrangements made for the election, which was more truly representative than ever before. The proclamations came from Prince Pozharski and the Cossack leader, and when the assembly met in 1613 in Moscow it was probably the first truly elected body that had ever sat in that city.

But it did not presage a revolution. It was not based on any wide popular vote. And the majority that sat on it with the same interests as those who, having brought the Muscovite state to the edge of disaster, had deserted it—the boyars, the large land owners, and the official class. Hence it is that the year 1613 does not stand out in Russian history as a memorable year of revolution or constitutional advance. It is noteworthy for the fact that it saw the accession of the first Romanov to the Russian throne.

Michael Romanov was sixteen when the national assembly conferred on him the title and power of Tsar—principally because his was the one name on which the great land owners and the Cossacks could agree. His election was in no way due to either his personality or his powers of leadership. Michael was a cousin of Ivan the Terrible through his wife Anastasia, and thus had a link with the ancient line of Rurik. The ill-fated Feodor or Theodore had been his first cousin. But the Romanovs were not pure Russian in ancestry. They had come from Lithuania at a time when the prosperity of Moscow under Ivan III had attracted a great influx of foreign merchants and fortune-hunters, and they had sprung quickly to the front ranks of the boyars, where, despite everything, they had steadily maintained

## THE RISE OF THE ROMANOVs

their position. Under Boris Godunov they had suffered great indignities and persecution, and it was in no small measure due to this that they had won the support of the Moscow populace as a whole. And they were diplomats. They sought favour in all quarters by taking no strong line on any point.

Thus it came about that Michael's election was unanimous. It was proclaimed amid universal rejoicing. No doubt his youth had much to do with it. So young a Tsar could have no strong predilections either way, and his policy could be moulded as desired. The lesson of Ivan IV had not been learnt in this respect.

And from Michael sprang the tree of the Romanovs, which was to run into flower in the time of Peter the Great, blossom again in the early summer of Alexander I, and finally to crash under the weight of its own decayed, dead wood in the time of Nicholas II. It is not entirely insignificant that the Romanovs rose out of one Time of Troubles and bequeathed, in their passing, another to their people.

## Chapter 9

# THE SHADOW OF SERFDOM

THE prosperity of the early Rus and hence of Kiev was founded on the slave trade. The Rus have always been fit and stalwart men; men who, having warred with Nature for generations, regard the law of the survival of the fittest as the first and foremost of the rules of living. They provided therefore admirable labour at a time when there was no substitute for the muscle-power of toiling men. And the early Russian nobles and land owners owed their wealth to slaves in a more direct sense. It was slaves who worked the land. The larger the number of slaves a man had the more land he could till, and the greater his crops. It was not, it is important to observe, the quantity of land owned that constituted wealth; it was the number of slaves available to till it. This difference, which may seem slight to Western habits of thought, is of vital importance. The idea of proprietorship in land comes late to Russian economy, and it has never been fully accepted, particularly by the peasants. A man's ability to work the land is his sole right to it. If he fails to till it, then it must be assigned to someone who will.

Thus the theme of the universal ownership of land, denying individual ownership, may be seen implicit in the workings of the first Russian state—the state of Kiev. Born in a slave-owning economy, it later became the foundation of a popular movement that was to alter the whole direction of Russian development; and its influence may be traced still steadily at work in the growth of the Soviet Union.

In later periods, Russia became known pre-eminently as the land of serfs. There are modern Russians whose immediate ancestors had known the bonds of serfdom. As a result, there has been a tendency to confuse the two and argue that slavery is something inherent in Slav organization.

It is important for an understanding of the Russian people, for a knowledge of the springs of their strength and their weaknesses, that the two aspects should be sharply distinguished. Serfdom, in the true sense, the attachment of the working peasant to his land, a 'landlord's fixture', as it were, at the disposal of his master, came in a formalized manner late in Russia—centuries after it had been

## THE SHADOW OF SERFDOM

abolished in England, for example. And because it started late it lingered late. Its late continuance is, in fact, the principal contributory factor to the belief that Russia lagged two centuries behind the rest of Europe. Whereas in Western Europe, and particularly in Frankish Gaul, serfdom was the almost inevitable outcome of the condition of the times, in Russia it was adopted deliberately as an act of high policy for national reasons. That, at any rate, is the legalistic position, though in fact serfdom antedated its constitutional recognition.

The peasant then was not during the whole of the Muscovite Empire, a slave. There were, of course, slaves in the state. The personal servants and attendants of the boyars, the nobles, and the landed gentry, were all held in slavery. But their numbers were relatively few. It was only among these that the old Rus tradition of buying and selling men and women as articles of commerce survived. These personal servants formed, indeed, a special class, and though they were subject to the whims—sometimes fantastically barbaric—of their masters, they were in many ways privileged, as the parasites and possessions of a powerful ruling caste tend to become in all countries. Their case was in some ways at least better than that of the peasants, who were technically free.

As in later years, this freedom was largely theoretical. It was signified most obviously in liability to taxation in place of military service, and it carried with it the right of changing the place of labour whenever and whither they liked. Of course, these freedoms could rarely be exercised. Freedom of movement connotes economic freedom also; and it was just here—as so often and in so many places—that the Russian peasant's technical freedom passed into a dependence perhaps more complete than that of slavery. For at least the slave owner owes this much to his slave: that he must house him and feed him and keep him in good condition or his value and usefulness will deteriorate. Few men will purposely allow their own property to depreciate.

Conditions had become such by the time of Ivan IV and Boris Godunov—i.e. by the closing years of the sixteenth century—that the peasants' freedom had long since disappeared. Taxation bore heavily upon them, and the tradition of Ivan Kalita, who made great profit out of tax collection, was not easily forgotten by the landed owners, with whose interests it accorded very well. These gentry were under the obligation to provide the State with levies as required in war and administer their territories in peace. Penalties, corrections, dues, both in money and in kind, provided them with a ready and seemingly inexhaustible source of revenue. In the long run, it

## THE RUSSIANS

was the peasant, the primary producer, who bore the weight of these burdens, whether they were directly imposed on him or not.

If this was one way in which the peasant was being exploited and forced into a position of complete dependence on the ruling class, there was another and more formidable course. The peasants had become, in the socialist phrase here particularly applicable, 'wage slaves' and the slaves of debt.

Peasants fell individually into one of two categories. On the one hand were the Crown or State peasants, on the other the private peasants. The former worked exclusively on the lands owned by the ruler—and as the ruler was the principal land owner of Muscovy, these formed a very large part of the peasant population. The private peasants laboured for various independent proprietors, of whom the greatest were the monasteries, almost the equal of the Crown in the extent of their lands.

So far as the Crown peasants were concerned their right to freedom of any kind had long since deteriorated into a legal fiction of the worst kind. The whole body employed at one particular spot was organized into a close system of corporations, which exercised collective responsibility for the acts of its members. Communal fees were paid by the corporation, which thus attained a stranglehold on the peasants' earnings. No doubt the individual Crown peasant still retained his right to move where he pleased. But if he chose to exercise it, he would in all probability break one of the local regulations of his corporation and find himself virtually in the position of a renegade outlaw. From this, of course, it is only a short step to serfdom, but that step was not taken till later—perhaps for the reason that there was no need, at that period, to acquire any further rights over the peasants.

The free non-Crown peasants were in no better case. Theirs was the dependency of every wage owner in a restricted labour market and since, as the result of bare subsistence, the majority of the peasants had become financially indebted to their employers, the bond was doubly fast. Some few, it is true, managed to retain sufficient independence to fulfil the requirements of financial solvency necessary for release, but the actual period during which a move might be made was restricted to that between the harvest and the sowing.

None the less, the nomad spirit welled up in the Russian as it always does, and his desire to 'scatter' forced him to break through the net that surrounded him. He might take to flight and risk the consequences. But more frequently he came to some arrangement with a neighbouring landlord whereby he transferred to the latter's service. This resulted as a rule in a distinct lowering of the peasant's

## THE SHADOW OF SERFDOM

standard and a further step towards utter dependency and serfdom. For frequently the new employer had to advance money to enable the peasant to secure his release; thus he started with a heavier burden than before. The shackles were riveted more firmly on him.

The latter part of the sixteenth century was marked by considerable expansion, principally eastwards. It was one of those periodical scatterings of the Russian people that have eventually built up a vast empire in the broadest sense. This, of course, had immense effects on the labour market. Large numbers of migrants moved to the new lands, leaving behind them their elders—who had contracted the obligations of service—with the same burdens to bear but fewer hands to take the weight. The labour shortage became acute, and for a time was so serious that part of the fertile country in the Moscow region began to revert to forest.

Now began a violent poaching of labour which, deplorable in itself in its effect on the conditions of the people, is to-day even more incredible for the attitude it reveals of the land owners to their employees. The richer proprietors, among them the monasteries, did not hesitate to try to save their fortunes by resort to every conceivable form of bribery and corruption. In the autumn peasants would be offered wages that were to them fabulous. Promises were made of lighter burdens, of lessening of taxation, and the like—and more often than not, it is to be feared, these promises were forgotten once they had served their turn in enticing the peasant from the smaller estates to the larger. Nor did the methods adopted stop at this form of attraction. Men were almost openly abducted when going about their normal affairs. They were made drunk and enticed into undertakings they might well try to repudiate when sober, but unavailingly. Disorders on a not inconsiderable scale followed in the wake of these practices.

It has been noted, in dealing with the conflict between the Muscovite Tsars and the boyars, that the latter had not learnt the lesson of strength through co-operation. If these highly placed and relatively educated men were so purblind, it is not surprising that the peasants showed no better realization of their opportunities. Perhaps for the first time in the history of Russian agriculture there was a shortage of labour. A peasants' leader, such as sprang up frequently in Western Europe during the Middle Ages, might have utilized this position skilfully for bettering the position of the peasant. He might even have succeeded in getting for the peasants a proper place in the scheme of things. But no such leader arose, and reform, when it came, was animated not by any desire to raise the status of the

## THE RUSSIANS

peasant but by the necessity for continuing the cultivation of the land over as wide an area as possible.

Actually the first steps taken to deal with the position were prompted by the necessity of preserving the small land-owning class, who formed the backbone of the army. Laws were introduced which forbade all movements of labour from small estates to large. If he wished to move and was free to do so the peasant might transfer from one small estate to another, but he might not sell his labour to a monastery or to a large land owner. That this preserved a class essential to the Russian state as then governed cannot be doubted. It is equally certain that this law was the first, and most significant, blow at the peasants' theoretical right to freedom. The shadow of true serfdom, legal serfdom, was already upon the toiler in the Russian fields.

All that remained, in effect, for the peasant who felt inclined to obey the Russian instinct to scatter, was flight. Severe penalties were demanded of those who resorted to this, the peasant's one remaining course to a problematical freedom. Not only was the fugitive open to all the punishments, some of them severe, meted out to those who tried to evade their liabilities; the landlord had also, by a process of notice and claim, the right of enforcing the fugitive's return to labour.

In the face of all this flight became more and more popular. Probably conditions were already so bad that the threatened penalties were in themselves no deterrent. And in 1597 a decree had to be promulgated by Boris Godunov to deal with the enormous list of claims made by land owners for missing peasants. The decree destroyed all claims made in respect of flights before 1592 unless they had been lodged before the 1st of September 1597. It was a temporary expedient, forced upon the Tsar by the march of events, and it is wrong to assert, as some have done, that it was the principal act that led to the full and final enserfment of the peasantry. It did not in any way alter the general laws. Nor did it help the peasants who were the least considered by the law-makers of Moscow. The right to removal was not withdrawn, but rather emphasized. And so was the fact that movement must be made only when the full conditions of freedom were fulfilled. The interests of the landlords were the first consideration, and it is probable that the case for the peasants was neither considered nor even put forward.

This legislation is, however, important in that it shows clearly the general trend of development. The Russian peasant was traditionally free. He had never been, as the peasants of other more enlightened lands in the West had been, a serf of lower value than the beasts he



## THE SHADOW OF SERFDOM

tended. But all that was changing. Conditions had forced dependence upon him. And, step by step, though a little behind the fact, the law was recognizing the new relation between employer and employed. The tendency was perhaps inevitable in view of the political shape of contemporary affairs; but it was psychologically bad, and from it sprang the vast agrarian problem which was eventually to bring Tsardom to a close and very nearly wreck its successor.

There was another trend that assisted the drift towards serfdom. Conditions in Russia were severe and the lesser gentry, whose service to the State was provided by military duties in place of taxation, were often hard put to it to make both ends meet. The younger members of such families were faced by prospects that had no trace of brightness about them and cast about for some means, however humble, of ensuring some sort of security for themselves. They had little enough to offer in all conscience, but they could sell their freedom. And this many of them did. They entered into voluntary contracts with the larger land owners, of whom they became dependants. To all intents and purposes they sold themselves into serfdom for the sake of exemption from taxation and military service. These agreements were held to be voluntary and terminable by notice on either side, but it seems doubtful whether the employers would be willing to dispense with labour that was virtually free or that the employees would be prepared to exchange the security they had won for the doubtful advantages of becoming free peasants.

The practice had greater significance than the fact that free men were prepared to accept slavery, important though this is as an illumination of conditions of the times. It was a direct threat to the prosperity and stability of the state. Each free man who entered into a dependent agreement represented a loss of either service or revenue. On the one hand the natural sources of recruits for the army were being tapped; on the other the exchequer was being imperilled. Moreover the position was aggravated by the circumstance that the possession of this slave labour put the large land owners into a position of virtual dictatorship. The free peasant had to face unfair competition in the labour market, while an ever increasing part of the nation's wealth began to accumulate in the hands of a few great landlords, notably the monasteries. Later, this practice was to be curtailed by law.

When the successors of Rurik passed away and the House of Romanov ascended the throne, the greater part of the journey towards serfdom had already been made. And already that characteristic feature of Russian thought, the idea of the Tsar as the great leveller, had taken hold of the popular mind. If the bond employee

## THE RUSSIANS

on the estate had to serve his master, that master in his turn had to serve the Tsar. Moreover the Tsar was seen from time to time in the role of fatherly protector of the peasantry. Some of the labour enactments of the times were directed as much at limiting the freedom of action of the land owners as at restricting the movements of peasants—for example, the decree making it an offence to kidnap labour from small estates. The reasons for these decrees were almost anything but a humanitarian desire to better the conditions of the peasant; they were prompted in the main by the need of maintaining the country's revenue and food supply. Yet they had that superficial appearance of holding a balance between the two sides of the agricultural population, the masters and the men.

The illusion of the Tsar as an inspired father of his people grew and lasted long, and like so many other intangible psychological motivations, played at times a decisive part in Russian development. To the outsider Russian affairs often seem illogical and the people lethargic. It is only when the psychological background of the people is realized that the seemingly irrational behaviour takes on a more cogent shape. The Russian, even the Russian peasant in his most illiterate days, was always apt to be deeply moved by ideas, which, once firmly held, would be maintained with almost fanatical courage in the face of all argument and the lessons of practical experience. It is this trait which causes progress in Russia to be spasmodic, with periods of inertia alternating with eras of vast expansion and activity. During the dormant periods old, outworn ideas chain the minds of the people, who seem unable to understand the conditions of their lives. During the active periods new ideas and orientations emerge, and by their freshness and appeal bring out all the vast hidden reserves of strength of the people.

Michael Romanov then was called to rule over a people from whom the reality of freedom was gradually and increasingly rapidly falling away. And the law regularizing the already accomplished fact, was slowly making slavery and serfdom the basis of the state.

But there was one section of the Russian people in whom burnt a fierce flame of freedom—the Cossacks. They have played so important a part in Russian history that it is worth while to sketch in lightly their origin. For centuries a thorn in the side of the Tsars with their insurrections and their claims to independence, the Cossacks later became one of the chief implements for closing the cracks in the gradually sinking structure of autocracy. It seems on the face of it a strange and inexplicable metamorphosis but it is, none the less, well in accord with the history of this warlike and tempestuous people.

## THE SHADOW OF SERFDOM

The word *kazak*, from which Cossack has been anglicized, is first officially used in 1444 in connection with the frontier forts of Ryazan, but traces of it may be found earlier. In the first instance *kazak* meant a casual labourer, a man in whom the Russian habit of scattering was so highly developed that he preferred wandering from place to place to any sort of settled home. These wanderers, the representatives *par excellence* of the original nomad Slav, made their living in any way that offered. Naturally they were to be found in the frontier lands, where settlements were few. They became hunters both of game and of men. They conducted irregular warfare against the Tartars and the other frontier peoples, and they scoured the dense woods and the great rivers for their food. Thus they developed into typical pioneers, tough in mind and body, ready to turn their hands to anything that looked profitable and, at the same time, did not demand steady application.

They were the obvious source from which frontier police might be recruited, and it is in this connection that they are first officially mentioned at Ryazan, where forts were constructed for the protection of the Russian Land in the fifteenth century. Here they were successful, but their innate independence made them tire of even the lax discipline of this form of state service. Gradually they formed groups and semi-settlements in the open steppe country with their own laws and customs, and owing only nominal allegiance to whoever might claim to rule the Russian Land. In this way arose the first Cossack republic—the Cossacks of the Don. When Ivan IV, enraged, so it is said, by the refusal of Queen Elizabeth to marry him, worked out his spleen by a campaign against these Cossacks, they fought boldly and bloodily and eventually made use of the Russian Land to effect their escape, true to that tradition of scattering which they had so strongly inherited. They migrated eastwards to the Urals and beyond, and their leader Yermak brought the Siberian lands, which they were the first to subdue, as a peace-offering to Ivan the Terrible. The colonization of Siberia is one of the greatest contributions made by the Cossacks to the growth of Russia.

Later the Cossacks formed further settlements of their own along the Dnieper and in the Kuban country. They were far from a closed caste. New additions were constantly being made to their strength, for their life attracted all those who, for whatever reason, found life in the settled regions of Russia impossible. They developed all the traits of a pioneer colonizing people, not least in their impatience of any authority but their own. They never gave allegiance to the Church as the rest of Russia did. Nominally Orthodox, they were ready to assert their own judgement at all times. And the Tsars had

## THE RUSSIANS

great difficulty in asserting their authority, which could be established only, and then temporarily, by fierce wars in open country, every inch of which was known to the Cossacks. The military tradition of this curious people later became a great asset to the Russian Empire.

The Cossacks have at all times been predominantly Russian, but they have drawn all races to them. In their early days they intermarried freely with Tartar renegades, and they did not hesitate to absorb persons from all the diverse peoples of the frontier regions. Thus they tended to stand apart from the rest of the Russian people, who came to regard them with suspicion. How nearly this distrust came to wrecking Russia has been seen in the affair of the siege of Moscow during the Time of Troubles. Even when the Cossacks had been brought wholly within the jurisdiction of the Russian state they still managed to maintain their own customs and enforce their claim to special treatment. To the later Tsars they gave lifelong military service, but never yielded taxation. And they were prepared to assert their independence by serving the Tsar against his people. Just as in the time of the Muscovite Empire the Cossacks kept the frontiers reasonably clear of invasion and warded off threats to the central government so, in recent times, the Cossacks fought against internal enemies of the Tsar. They have always been soldiers of fortune, exercising the right to use their skill in arms where they willed. And if the Tsars came to rely on them later it was only because no other support was available. The Cossack, as his whole history shows, was quite as ready to crush authority as to uphold it.

Yet, historically, this people has a very deep significance. It shows that side of the Slav character which has so often been obscured by the other and more docile one. Nothing, it has been said, happens in Russia except by extremes. Nowhere are these extremes more evident than in the contrast between the peasantry, slowly driven into subjection and serfdom, and the Cossack settlements vigorously upholding their independence and freedom even in the teeth of the Tsar's armies.

But for the Cossacks the Poles might have gained control over Russia during the Time of Troubles. In the seventeenth century the Cossacks served the Poles—only later to turn against them and lay the foundation of the so-called 'Little Russia'. They have been a stormy influence in Russian history as well as one of its most picturesque features. Whatever their crimes and shortcomings they have continually puffed the fresh air of freedom into the hothouse of Russian autocracy.

## Chapter 10

# MICHAEL TO PETER

After the Time of Troubles came the time of recuperation. The fierce struggle that had so long been waged between the Tsars and the boyars had been settled by the sudden and unexpected intervention of the people. It was as though some large but indolent father had suddenly roused himself from his stupor and, losing his temper, had put an end to the bickering between two of his children. The foreign invaders had been thrown out. Russia had shown, as she was to show more than once in after years, that she would stand no foreign intervention in the affairs of Moscow. The Russian Land is the Russian Land, and whatever the faults of the Russians may be, they tenaciously hold that they themselves are alone capable of deciding Russian business. Foreign influence may wax and wane in Russia. Its movements are like some seismic tide in Russian policies. But let it be suggested that a foreigner has the right to stand in the Russian capital and call the tune, and there is only one unanimous answer from the Russians. It is usually given quickly and decisively.

The events that led to the election of Michael Romanov to the Tsardom are usually described as a revolution, but this goes too far. It is true that there was something revolutionary in the rising of the people and in their insistence that their will be heard. But a true revolution alters the whole face of a country, giving to it a new form of government, new ideals, a new national life. Mere resort to arms does not make a revolution. Indeed, as English history shows, it is possible for bloodless revolutions to have effects far more fundamental and lasting than some enforced by civil war. The plain fact is that the risings of the Time of Troubles did nothing to shift the movement of Russian development from the course charted out for it. It did nothing to free the people, to transfer power from one class to another, to alleviate distress, or to raise general prosperity. The armed rebellion of Minin and his Cossack allies was the people's reply to chaos in high quarters. It was not a crusade for a new way of life, whether better or worse. 'Revolution' is a word that should be reserved for the great tectonic movements of history.

One may indeed find traces of some new force in Russian affairs during the earlier parts of Michael's reign. There was some sort of

recognition of the need of popular representation, and the national assembly that had elected the Tsar was called together for deliberations several times. But it is not possible to transform a country overnight, as it were, into a democracy. In more enlightened parts of the world the seventeenth century was the period of parliamentary growth and the vanguard nations, like England, were fighting a war against the retreating forces of privilege—a war that is even now not at an end. It would be too much to expect that, at one stroke, a people illiterate even in its upper strata, could cut away all the accumulated bastions of autocracy.

Yet it is fair to say that there was for a short time—a very short time—a greater appeal to popular opinion than had ever occurred in Russian affairs. It was not to inaugurate a new age of freedom that this was done; probably the conception of freedom even in the seventeenth-century English sense did not exist in Russia. It was the direct result of the conditions of the times.

The new dynasty has none of the prestige that had attached to its predecessor. The hereditary element was slight. The Tsar himself was young and inexperienced and the executive power was vested in his father, Philaret, a man of great energy and not a little ability. The boyars had made themselves unpopular and were in no position to assume responsibility. There was no chance that the line of evolutionary development towards parliamentary government might be followed. In other countries power has slowly passed from monarchy to oligarchy and so to democracy. In seventeenth-century Russia the next rung in the ladder was, if not missing, at any rate weak and ready to snap. The boyars had neither the ability themselves nor the popular backing to come forward as a powerful council advising and controlling the Tsar.

Thus the central government was uncertain of itself. Yet the problems it had to face were enormous. The country was in a state of universal disorder. The whole of the old form of local government had broken down. Worst of all, the machinery for the collection of taxes had collapsed, and the funds necessary for the establishment of order had dried up at the source. These were matters that demanded swift and strong action. Moreover the foreign relations of Russia were tangled and needed putting to rights. Over all this loomed the fact—which must have astonished the boyars—that there was a force of popular opinion in the country ready to express itself in no uncertain voice.

The national assembly—the *zemski sobor*—was therefore summoned and used as a means of re-establishing government. For two years it virtually replaced the older institutions as the controlling



power of the country. The Council of Boyars lapsed, and even the executive passed into the hands of the assembly. During the thirty-two years of Michael's reign, from 1613 to 1645, this assembly met as many as ten times.

But there was never any question of its permanency. It was a stop-gap. Tsar, regent, and boyars saw in it a way of shifting from themselves the responsibility for awkward and unpopular decisions. The national assembly sprang fully armed into the Russian world; and like most prodigies it did not survive to middle age. Its very success was its undoing. It imposed taxation that brought funds again to the central government; and with money at their disposal the Tsar and the boyars began to feel themselves more secure. It had no political experience, and its foundation did not rest firmly on any sort of right. It could be summoned if the Tsar so wished or even if the supreme council of the Orthodox Church desired. But it had no privilege of assembling on its own. And even at the height of its brief power it never established that complete control over finance which must forgo any attempt at popular government in conflict with a monarchy.

As the power of the Romanovs increased so that of the assembly decreased. Alexis, Michael's immediate successor, reigned for almost exactly the same time—thirty-one years as against Michael's thirty-two. But there were only five meetings of the assembly in that period. The need for the assembly had been halved. By 1698 it had held its final meeting. It lasted for less than a century, worn out by its own precocity. The Russian people were not yet ready for it, and the chance thus missed was not to recur for many, many years, when history was curiously to repeat itself.

It was not only that the time was not ripe. The assembly lost more and more of its representative power. In its later years it was far from being the embryo organ of national opinion that it had been in its prime. And it never had the solid support of those whom it was supposed to represent.

History shows, in fact, that so far from inaugurating a new era of popular government, the so-called 'revolution' of the Time of Troubles was more of a reaction. In the sixteenth century there had been signs of a trend towards decentralization, and the principle of elective local government appeared in a rudimentary form. In the seventeenth century this movement petered out. If there was a show of democracy at the top the foundations of it were undermined at the bottom. The power of local government was transferred increasingly to Moscow.

Once again, as in the days of Kiev and Novgorod, Russia had had to face a choice between autocracy and representative government.



And once again the choice had been for autocracy. It was, of course, a choice determined by forces other than free selection; but because it had the appearance of a free choice it gave autocracy a hold it might otherwise never have regained. The principle of autocracy was to be developed under the Romanovs as never before even in Russia, and the shackles were to be riveted more and more firmly on the Russian people. For it was no longer confined to the Tsar. He was the apex, under the new dispensation, of a pyramid of minor tsars, each absolute in his own local sphere. The old safeguards of local assemblies were swept aside. The road stood wide open to tyranny.

One more factor was also at work: the destruction of the very basis on which popular government could rest. In the last chapter the stage was set for the introduction of serfdom. It was shown how, one by one, the liberties of the peasants were pared away till nothing but an empty husk remained. Without a free population there could be no free election. Russia's first attempts at self-government were, in fact, lopped off at the top and dug out at the roots at one and the same time.

The revolutionary effects of the Romanov accession have little significance on the political side. The *status quo* was restored. The forward march of autocracy was given renewed impetus. If revolution there was, it was in the introduction of new features of life that tended to be more and more restrictive. The old plant had been torn and a new cutting from the same stock planted in its stead. From the first it began to bring forth new and more sinister flowers.

Despite the autocracy of early Muscovite rule under the House of Rurik, there had been a good deal of freedom so far as the social organization went. There were no hard and fast barriers. While the boyars, for example, placed great stress upon their lineage and on the hereditary ranking of their families, there was a constant influx of new members to the class. These were recruited from the merchants and the townsmen and the smaller land owners. We have already seen how impoverished younger sons of the lesser gentry were prepared to sell their freedom and pass into the bondage of the monasteries in their role of great landlords. Princes and boyars there were, but the idea of an exclusive aristocracy, of a hierarchy of caste extending downwards from the Tsar, had not shown itself in the Russian thought of the time. The boyars, it will be remembered, looked on themselves as equals rather than subjects of the Tsar. In this way something of the tradition of the Old Russia, and particularly of Novgorod, lingered.

Reviving autocracy, its dictates endorsed by an illusory public support, brought all this freedom to an end. The reign of Michael

and his immediate successors saw the establishment of a rigid caste and class system. This was the outcome to some extent of the new form of local government. The local officials had to be graded according to their responsibilities. Obviously the governor of a small territory was of less importance in the hierarchy than the governor of a large province or of a big town.

The movement thus started, it spread to all walks of life. In every part of the community class barriers were raised, and so rigidly were they observed that escape from one class into another was made virtually impossible. Legislation helped along this trend—as in the example already quoted of the prohibition of surrendering ‘freedom’ for slavery on the part of certain classes.

It was all part, too, of the introduction of serfdom. When serfdom became officially recognized the last stage was reached. The old Russian State may be likened to a viscous fluid in which the molecules, while being free to move, yet have difficulty in doing so. The New Russia of the Romanovs may be compared to a geological formation with each stratum clearly defined and so organized that only a catastrophic force destroying the whole could cause mingling. The serf at the bottom of these strata bore the weight of the whole. Crushed down by the top weight he had still this poor consolation: that if he collapsed the rest must topple too.

Serfdom was the characteristic contribution of the early Romanovs to Russia. Feodor I and Boris Godunov had perhaps accelerated its coming and general tendencies had increased its probability. But it was the Romanovs who gave it legal status, who accepted meekly a line of development that stronger and more enlightened rulers might have opposed. They accepted serfdom as inevitable, and the greatest of them, Peter, endorsed it in spite of his otherwise Westernizing influence. And as they had made it part of their régime so it brought them down. The last Romanov saw the structure collapse and the abyss open before his feet.

The Time of Troubles had denuded the countryside. Many peasants had gone to search for a livelihood elsewhere, in the new lands being opened up in the east. Oppressed by home conditions, they took to the road in the Russian way, knowing that somewhere in the vastness of the Russian Land there must be something to sustain them. No doubt this benefited considerable numbers of the people individually, but it spelt ruin for the state. The ‘free’ peasants were themselves taxpayers. Their absence, therefore, meant loss. And the land owners and gentry were in no position to fulfil their various obligations if they could not obtain labour to till their fields.

It was this problem which caused the greatest worries to the young Tsar Michael and his administration. The situation was critical. Unless something like normal cultivation could be restored the future of the Muscovite Empire was precarious. The first step decided upon was to assess the numbers remaining so that the best use could be made of them. The next was to re-establish the villages and attempt to re-create their prosperity. Even then it was obvious that there was not much likelihood of recalling by fine words and promises the families who had left behind their all.

Disaster overtook this scheme at the start. The census was started in 1619 when Michael had been on the throne six years. It was pushed forward with energy, making allowance for the lack of communications and the difficulty of the task. By 1626 the records were complete. In that year one of those great conflagrations that were common in Moscow swept the capital, and the work of years perished in the flames. Now the work was resumed with even greater intensity and by 1628 the census had been retaken in its entirety.

Each peasant as he was numbered was given the order that was not to be rescinded for very many years. He was told to stay where he was. Another link was added to his already heavy chain. Already he was bound to his landlord by contracts, and the terms of these grew harsher and harsher. By the time of the census serfdom was prevalent in all but name. The right to change employers had been signed away, and he had pledged himself and his family in such a way that they had become the chattels of the employer. True, he was given the right of cultivating a strip of land for his own subsistence. But the price demanded was heavy: so many hours of labour per week. Here, in embryo, was the Russian serf system then on the point of formulation, with the peasant tied to his strip of land by the double haltèr of a state command and a nominally free but really dictated contract of labour. And to each of these bondholders he had his obligations. To the one he had to pay his taxes, to the other he had to give his labour.

The mere comparison of this state of affairs with the assertion that the national assembly was governing for the people shows the absurdity of the claim. This policy was dictated by the boyars, who were making the most of their opportunities before the Tsar's power reasserted itself. The final step, when it came, represented no noticeable deterioration of the status of the peasants. They were declared the absolute property of their masters. They could be bequeathed and disposed of in the same manner as any other form of property.

The original enactments of serfdom tried to establish that, in taking away the freedom of the peasants, new and compensating

obligations were laid upon the land owners. On the latter was laid the responsibility for collecting all the taxes payable by the peasantry. To the peasant was given, so it was said, security. To the landlords was given the financial burden. As events proved, it was unwise to stress this point, as also that of comparing the land service of the peasants with the military service the masters had to give. The unilateral adjustments that marked later years seemed in truth to the peasants—whose memories are long and sometimes appear as if they were inherited—like the unscrupulous breaking of a sacred bargain.

It took thirty years to formulate legally in decrees and acts of state the transition from factual serfdom to constitutional serfdom. And there can be little doubt that though on the surface the laws marked no real change, the true position of peasants deteriorated greatly. Secure in their new legal powers, the employers did not hesitate to go to the utmost in their demands for forced labour and in restricting the size of the individual plot the peasant himself might cultivate for his own needs. The land owners appeared indeed to be engaging in an unholy form of competition—not, this time, for the right to dictate the lives of fellow-men, as they had in the days of abducting 'free' peasants, but for the distinction of exploiting to the full this gift of wageless labour.

On the face of it the solution of the agricultural problem was a neat and efficient one. A check had been placed on the disastrous drift from the central cultivated provinces to the outer fringe of colonies. Stability had been introduced for the first time into Russian agriculture. The treasury stood to benefit considerably.

But this facile picture of the situation was painted only by unrealized wishes. The serfdom laws of 1620–50 mark the beginning of the great decline of Russian farming, and of the dichotomy between the peasant and the master that was to fester into a gangrenous wound very nearly fatal to the state.

The serfdom laws removed every incentive to honest dealing and honest work. It substituted for the principle of due reward, however meagre, a premium on fraud. On the one side were the masters, who stood to profit most from wringing as much as they could from their bonded labour. Their position was absolute and they could use almost any methods they chose in dealing with their serfs. On the other hand, the peasants had nothing to gain from a good honest day's toil. The land owners could cover up inefficiency by driving their serfs harder. The serfs, in their turn, were ready to take every advantage they could of circumstance. On the one side exploiters, on the other thieves. That is not too strong a description of the situation at its worst.

It was principally by this act that the Romanovs bought their long tenure of the Russian throne. And in the end it brought its nemesis.

The seeming stability achieved by these and other laws passed under Michael did not last for long. During the period of Alexis, Michael's son and successor, there were many uprisings and revolts. Alexis ascended the throne in 1645. In 1648 there was a popular outbreak in Moscow, which was reflected in other large centres, and which was directed against the growing tyrannical acts of the boyars whom the Tsar was not yet powerful enough to hold in check. New laws were hastily drafted under the advice of a national assembly, but the unrest was not calmed. In 1650 Pskov and Novgorod openly revolted and the risings were put down by force.

It was an ill-timed moment to attempt currency reforms, but this is what Alexis's advisers did, replacing silver coins by copper. Immediately certain people, including the Tsar's father-in-law and many members of the nobility, began to mint copper on their own account. The result was one of the fiercest rebellions of even those times. A party of rebels actually came upon the Tsar and threatened him. What followed became familiar in Russian history. The bodyguard fired on the insurgents, and after their dispersal a terror held the city. There were mass executions in which innocent and guilty perished equally. The blameless no less than the culprits found themselves exiled or their property confiscated. It was the pattern of many such affairs in later Russian history.

Finally there came one of the most famous insurrections of all—that of Stenka Razin. This was on a much larger scale. It began in the Don area, among the turbulent Cossacks. Then it spread to the Volga country. Rapidly it gained support—largely as the result of Razin's generosity with the loot his soldiers acquired—until the whole of south-eastern Russia seemed in arms against Moscow. Nor was it entirely a domestic affair. Tartar and Finnish tribes, still uneasy under Russian suzerainty, joined it, and Stenka Razin made them welcome. By the time the revolt had penetrated as far as Nizhni-Novgorod—the town from which Minin launched his crusade for freedom—it was of sizable proportions. The whole forces of Moscow were concentrated on quelling it, but it was not until a pitched battle had been fought at Simbirsk, and Razin himself captured and executed, that its back was broken.

That was in 1671. Five years later Alexis died. His weak and ailing son succeeded him as Feodor III. He was still only twenty when he died in 1682.

So far the Romanovs had achieved but little beyond the enhancement of the power and prestige of the boyar families from which

## MICHAEL TO PETER

they themselves have sprung. There was autocracy on a firmer footing, but it was a delegated autocracy, and the boyars were the real power in the land. In the next reign this was to be altered. Three ineffectual Tsars had given a false impression of the Romanov capacity to produce a great man. For as Feodor passed Peter stepped in. And with Peter came a new Russia symbolized in a new capital that was to run its course with the Romanovs and die with them.

## Chapter 11

# THE WEST WIND

Peter I is one of the great legends of Russian history. The maker of modern Russia, feared, admired, and hated alike by his contemporaries, he has become the embodiment of Tsardom at its best and most ruthless—and by a curious turn of fate one of the national heroes acknowledged by the Soviet Union, one of whose most eminent authors, Alexei Tolstoy, has written a biographical novel about him. Peter had the greatness that overrides all considerations of politics or ideology. His gigantic personality, fitting in that huge frame six feet eight inches in height, seems to have had sufficient momentum to make itself felt across the gulf of nearly two and a half centuries which separates his time from ours. Peter became Tsar not merely because he was the son, by a second wife, of Alexis I, but also because he was fitted above all men for the task of gathering together once again, like Ivan the Great, the Russian Land. He shattered the growing belief that the Romanovs were a line of comfortable nonentities with whom the boyars could do as they would. He was a leader who not only did not spare himself but actually preferred the rough life of the mechanic to the existence of indulgent ease that was characteristic of the Kremlin court.

It will be sufficient if the main facts of Peter's achievements are sketched in. The story of Peter has so often been told, so many anecdotes have been related to him, that at this time of day almost anything that could be said of him must be vain repetition. And the man, picturesque as he was, is still less important than the work he did in stamping a new pattern on the Russian people and in turning their eyes towards a larger world. If Ivan the Great gathered together the fragments and made of them one Russian Land with Moscow at its head, Peter took Russia into the wider world and made her part of the comity of nations.

He has been likened to a whirlwind. But he is perhaps better thought of as a steady westerly gale blowing away the dust and cobwebs that had accumulated in the Kremlin through the centuries. He built his capital of Petersburg to give Russia a window into Europe. But he did more. He opened wide that window and let the great refreshing gale of Western ideas blow throughout Russia. If



## THE WEST WIND

some died because they could not stand the exposure that was of no account to Peter. He was a realist who permitted nothing to stand between him and the goal he sought. And unconsciously, like so many of his kind, he believed wholeheartedly in the principle of the survival of the fittest two centuries before Darwin enunciated it.

When Feodor died the throne passed to two sons of Alexis, Ivan and Peter. Ivan was a weakling, the second son of Alexis by his first wife. Peter, from the earliest age, showed every sign of force of character and of possessing a will of his own. His sister Sophia had something of the same relentless energy. As regent she showed signs of that masterful drive for undisputed power which was one of Peter's strongest characteristics. Peter was only a boy when he was made co-Tsar with Ivan, whose unhappy life terminated early, to leave Peter in sole control.

Peter was eleven years old when Sophia placed herself at the head of the palace revolution and, with the aid of the Guard, the Streltsy, banished him and his mother to the village of Preobrazhenskoe, some distance outside Moscow. Thus she was able to gain complete control of the state and establish her favourites in positions of power. If she hoped by this means to get rid for good of her turbulent brother she could have made no greater mistake. For it was this banishment from the usual environment of a young Russian prince which enabled Peter's special genius to develop along original lines. His natural impulses were no longer curbed by the relatively polite usages of the Kremlin. He had ample scope to indulge his love of the open air. With his small friends he drilled and manœuvred; and from these boyish activities, half play, half serious, he created the nucleus of an officer corps that was later to convert the medieval levy army of Moscow into the first modern Russian army.

He believed in using and developing that vast body of his; he believed also in enlarging his mind. The village of Preobrazhenskoe gave him opportunities of doing so—opportunities he would never have found within the walls of Moscow, where the dead hand of tradition was laid on everything. Here was a small foreign colony, and Peter learnt eagerly from them. He studied mathematics and navigation. He learnt from a Dutchman the elements of ship-building. He made himself a capable mechanic and cast guns. Probably he had never seen any water other than the broad, even-flowing rivers of the Russian plain. Yet he developed an immense passion for the sea. In him the twin urges of the Russian land-sailor and perhaps the inherited sea lore of a remote Varangian ancestor mingled completely. The lure of the sea was dominant in all Peter's work. It was this which led him, as it were, to break out of the prison

## THE RUSSIANS

of the great central plain and bring the centre of Russian life and culture to the edge of the sea.

When he made his famous tour of Europe it was not the progress of a royal potentate. He was not in search of entertainment and flattery, of state balls and regal receptions. Peter sought knowledge of the ways of the West—the knowledge that would enable him to make Russia into a modern state and give her a rightful place among the progressive nations of the world. Eager as he was to imbibe the then nascent mechanical culture of Holland and England, he yet remained personally, essentially, and completely Russian. Many an inn found its resources strained to the utmost to provide the gargantuan feasts he and his companions demanded. Empty cellars and gutted larders marked the passage of his suite.

Probably nothing exhibits more clearly his character than the remark he made after listening to a debate in the British House of Lords, carried on in the presence of King William III. 'No doubt', he said, 'it is a good thing that subjects should express their opinions with reserve before their monarch. Much good may come of it. But it will not do for me. I will have none of this in my country.' One can imagine the shrug of the enormous shoulders. Peter's trust lay in himself and, after that, in action rather than in words.

The paramount feature of Peter's policy was its simple coherence. He was no deep thinker, no subtle planner. But he saw certain elementary facts clearly and set out to ensure their realization. First and foremost was the need of Westernizing Russia, of bringing his country up to date. The second main point arose from the first. He saw that Russia must have contact with the West and that that meant the possession of access to the sea. From this arose his continuous wars with Sweden, wars that went on intermittently throughout his reign and culminated in the transfer of the capital from the central plain to the marshes of the north-west.

The knowledge he had acquired in the West—and he was a tireless learner who would let nothing go till he had mastered it—showed him that Russia as it then was could never wage a successful war against a modern state. The administrative machinery alone, traditional, slow, much of it extemporized to meet needs long since vanished, was enough to smother the efforts of the modern wars he contemplated. Thus it was that he started his policy of wholesale reform. His energy was unquenchable. He could leave nothing as he found it. Perhaps some of his reforms were reforms merely for reform's sake. But in the then state of Russia such drive was needed.

It would be gratifying to say of this masterful man that he had liberal tendencies, that he saw in the people the true destiny of

## THE WEST WIND

Russia. He had no such ideas. He succeeded to an autocracy, and he made that autocracy more powerful than it had ever been. His subjects, from prince to peasant, felt that he had a rod for each one and would not hesitate to use it unsparingly. Peter was Antichrist. He was the agent of the devil dragging Russia to ruin. But he did not care what people said. He had his own convictions and he remained true to them.

No sphere of Russian life was untouched by his eager hands. He parodied the ritual of the Church at bouts—public bouts—with his drinking friends. He crushed at last the powers of the boyars' council, replacing it by a Senate that acted as his intermediary between himself and the State. He wanted money. He wanted men. He wanted material. Peter's wants were endless, whether he was waging a war or building a fleet, creating a new capital or seeking to establish industry. Accordingly he devised a new pattern of government, splitting the country into 'governments' or provinces, each with its own machinery for the collection of taxes and levies and organizing supply. He realized his childhood's dream and gave Russia her first modern army, able to meet the powerful Swedes on equal terms, and he founded the Russian fleet.

After twenty-one years he finally broke the power of Sweden at Poltava. The war had been intermittent rather than continuous and the Russians had lasted better. Moreover their equipment, thanks to Peter, was superior. Thus he gained what he wanted—not only access to but command of the Baltic. Here, in his new possessions, amid the Neva marshes, he began to build his new capital, the capital that would be his own city and symbolize the deliverance of himself and his country from the associations, the orientalizing influence, of Moscow. It was typical of him that, with his own hands, he built the simple cottage that was to be his headquarters while he restlessly controlled the construction of the city, to which he brought some of the finest architects in Europe. And as he never spared himself so he did not spare his labourers. He had compulsory drafts sent from all parts of Russia and took no heed of the fact that they died like flies. Whatever happened, the work must go on. St. Petersburg, his own city, must be built.

The tale of the construction of Petersburg, a capital built to order, rising unpredictably out of the marshes, is the subject of a book in itself. It is beyond doubt that to Peter it was something more than a new city. He had no time for pomp and circumstance, and even when the core of Petersburg was built his own dwelling was more humble than that of many of his nobles. Peter did not build for the glory of himself but in token of the great drive that was in him—a

drive that was not now so much bringing the West to Russia as thrusting Russia into the West. And Peter was at least near the sea. The whole fantastic episode of uprooting a capital, denying a tradition that had been built up slowly and with difficulty, building a town where no town should have been built, was to him a symbol. Moscow spoke of the Old Russia, the old feuds, the old submissiveness. Moscow was ever too ready to turn eyes to the East rather than the West.

Above all Moscow represented the Church. Peter hated the Church. In his younger days he openly ridiculed it. When he came to full power and maturity he set about clipping its wings. To a man of Peter's energy and temperament the Church was too powerful. He could tolerate no division of authority, no rival who might dispute with him and hope to prevail. 'There shall be none of it in my country.' And there was not room in him for a twin religion. He himself worshipped the State, to which he dedicated the whole of his life with a fanaticism that few rulers, whether born to power or risen to it, have shown.

From the mere point of view of temperament, therefore, Peter almost necessarily hated the Church. But the question of his temperament notwithstanding, there was still one aspect of the Church's outlook that made conciliation impossible between Tsar and Church. Peter's thoughts turned ever to the West, to the world of new ideas. He was the direct antithesis of everything the Church stood for. The Church had its eyes fixed on the past—or perhaps it would be better to say on an unchanging present which was a fossilized past. It dreamt not of a Russia taking her place among the leading nations of a progressive Europe but of Moscow as the Third Rome, gathering together into the one fold of her Orthodoxy the erring sheep of the world in general and of Europe in particular. To Peter the West meant progress, knowledge, wealth, power. To the Church the West meant heresy and damnation. It was not only among the more credulous peasants that Peter assumed the appearance of Antichrist. Indeed the Church itself prompted and originated that view of him.

Other rulers and leaders, particularly in the Western countries, had faced this problem before—of forcing reforms though in the face of a church that was ultra-conservative and possessed of great power. In some countries it had led to the Reformation. But Peter had little subtlety. He went about his tasks in what he thought was the quickest and more direct way, and he was sufficiently in the tradition of Tsardom to enforce his will by any means available.

So it was that he did not, as Henry VIII did in England, go about

breaking the power of the Church piecemeal. Peter struck hard—and at the top. He abolished the Patriarchate. In the Patriarch he saw a considerable rival, with powers in some respects hardly less than his own. It was not to be tolerated. And perhaps he knew that loyalty and devotion are far more likely to be given to single individuals than to a group. The Patriarch disappeared and in his place appeared a Holy Synod, which was not even autonomous in Church affairs. Its work was supervised by a Procurator-General of Peter's own nomination—and that official was a layman, whose connections were, more often than not, with the Army rather than the Church. Thus he placed the whole of the Church organization in a position of dependency on and subserviency to the new state he was creating. Henry VIII appointed himself head of the Church because he was at heart a religious man and wanted the support of the Church for his policies. Peter was not religious in the conventional sense. He would gladly have abolished the Church altogether. For this reason he subdued it without identifying his own personal power with it. And because of the strength of public opinion to which, in spite of all superficial indications, he was acutely responsive, he made no overt attacks on the Church itself. He did not follow the example of Henry VIII and purloin the vast amassed wealth of the monasteries.

In the past Church and State had been one, but in a very different sense from Peter's. The Moscow Grand Princes had come to be regarded as overlords very much because it had been part of their policy to show themselves as the First Sons of the Church. In the days of the principalities—of Kiev and Novgorod and of early Muscovy—the Church had been the one truly unifying force throughout the Russian Land. A man might belong to Kiev or to Novgorod, to Pskov or some village in the forest. There his political loyalty ended. But he was conscious also of being Orthodox, of belonging to the One Church. It was this, more than blood or common origin, that made him realize his brotherhood with the other inhabitants of the Russian Land, even though he might be engaged in civil war with some of them. This sense of communion by faith rather than by blood took long to die in the peasant outlook. Centuries after Russia became a nation the ordinary peasant had no conception of nationality. What differentiated him from another was that he was Orthodox and that other was non-Orthodox; and in this sense he might regard the non-Slav Orthodox as nearer to him than the Slav Roman Catholic. Pan-Slavdom, that remarkable movement of the last years of the Russian Empire, was in fact a restatement of the old ideal of the Third Rome and basically aimed at gathering together the Slav peoples in the Orthodox communion rather than bringing them

under the rule of the Tsar, however political perversions of the theme might obscure the fact.

Even a man so strong and ruthless as Peter could not tamper with a belief so deeply rooted that it had become almost an instinct. He had no wish to promote open rebellion. True, he did not fear the bloodshed or suffering it might involve. He was always ready to pay the fullest price for anything he wanted. But he saw himself as a driver sadly behind time, and he did not intend that obstacles should hamper his breakneck struggle to catch up with the rest of the world. So far as this concerned the Church he was content that he had restricted its power and freedom of action and forced it into the pattern of the state he was creating.

In the forty-three years of Peter's reign, those four decades when Russia was racked by the birth-pangs of a new civilization, there was only one year when the country was officially at peace: 1724, the year before his death. It has been the fault of conventional history to focus attention on those wars that went on continuously. They must be seen, however, in their true perspective. Peter was not greedy for new land, except as the need for expansion was related to his passion to modernize Russia. If he fought Sweden it was to gain for Russia access to the Baltic and a link with Europe. When, his ambition won in the north-west, he turned from the shores of the Baltic to the shores of the Caspian, it was to obtain an outlet into Asia. War was a necessity to Peter not only in so far as it secured sea outlets for Russian economic expansion, but also because it aided his main, ruling obsession. Here in this book we are not concerned with wars but with the forces moulding the Russian people at home, and it is with this aspect of Peter's work that we must deal.

It is difficult to disentangle the good from the bad among Peter's reforms. His terrific energy was expended on big things and little, worthy ends and trivial ones. Much on which he placed importance was really of little account, and at the same time he was blind to many things to which he might profitably have turned his attention. Two factors alone influenced his work: one was his unquenchable drive and restlessness; the other was his utilitarianism. There was nothing of the doctrinaire, the ideologist, about Peter. He had one test to apply to everything, great or small: 'Will it work?' One finds in what he did the most revolutionary ideas side by side with the most reactionary. He extemporized and improvised. He tinkered and made do. And his dynamism somehow or other ensured that this hotch-potch of opportunism produced results of lasting effect.

Peter's god was Russia—not the Russian people but the Russian state. He saw himself as the director of that state, in some senses its



re-creator. But he never went so far as to worship himself or set himself up as a demigod. He was by nature a despot, but his despotism was the product of his force of character, not of a pathological exaggeration of his own importance. As a result, he valued more the man who was conscientious and who could carry out an order precisely than the man who sought to win his favour by adulation and flattery. He had no time for sycophants, and the men whom he gathered round him had to be prepared to live as hard and as laboriously as their master.

His wars were necessary for the good of the Russian state. If they were to be successful it was vital to reorganize that state. These considerations are basic to events of Peter's reign; and their recognition has given rise to the legend that all Peter's work was based on his military policy and desire for aggrandizement. External and internal policies interacted one on the other. He saw the need for a seaboard and Sweden barred the way. Therefore he had to eliminate Sweden and establish a footing in the Baltic States. That meant reform and re-equipment of the Army. The modernization of the Army opened up new ways of improving Russia on the model he had planned. So the spiral went on. It has the semblance of a perpetual motion machine till one remembers Peter's own driving momentum was behind its action.

Taking a broad view of Peter's reign the remarkable fact is that so much was in fact achieved. He was neither administrator nor psychologist and he had not the gift of attracting advisers of the right stamp to his side. He knew what he wanted. He devised ways and means of securing it. But the one was never really co-ordinated with the other. And it was from this fact that arose the troubles and trials which Peter inflicted on his people. He did nothing to abolish the fundamental weakness of Russia, a weakness that seems only now to be yielding to treatment: her proneness to famine and lack of essential supplies. In fact, he increased that weakness by adding to the territory of his empire and therefore to the number of mouths that had to be filled.

If Peter wanted men to wage his wars or build his new capital he got men—by force if necessary, and more often than not. But he did not stop to consider that if those men were engaged in war or building they could not till the land. He ignored the fact that they had to be fed themselves, if only to maintain their efficiency for his own purposes. He moved his population hither and thither according to the needs of the moment and the ambition that held him for the moment. Yet, it must be repeated, in spite of all this he has solid achievement to his credit.



He perhaps deserves more than any other Tsar that title of 'leveller' which Russian tradition assigned to the country's rulers. He aimed and strove valiantly for the ideal of equal service to the State from all. He was against inherited privilege or the power that comes from accident of position only. He varied his everlasting question, 'Will it work?' to 'What work does he do for the State?' when he evaluated a man. He introduced this principle first into the Army, which had been traditionally recruited from certain groups of society. By the time his reforms were completed there was not a class of the Russian people that had not its representatives in ranks or officers' mess. He swept away the peasants' exemption from military service and began a form of conscription which, although not universal, was none the less hard.

No less stringent was his policy in regard to the aristocracy, who had hitherto monopolized both the Army and the State service. His decrees of universal service applied no less to them than to the peasants. Indeed, for them the decrees were even harsher. For all, irrespective of their rank and origin, must now serve the State in one capacity or another.

Nobility itself was determined by the nature and quality of this service—and by that alone. Evasion involved the direst penalties. Peter drew up the table of ranks, covering fourteen degrees through which the gentleman-servant of the State must pass. This was one of the most enduring and crushing legacies Peter left his country. From it came that vast, self-contained bureaucracy which reduced State management and administration to formula, substituted memoranda for action, and eventually strangled all enterprise in the Russian Empire. There was no privileged entry to any of the higher grades. Each entrant, no matter what his origin, started at the lowest; and this system applied no less to the Army and the Church than to the civil service or the commercial organizations of the State. It had the curious effect of making the Royal Guard an all-aristocratic corps, ranks and officers all coming from the nobility; and this had in it the germ of a military dictatorship of which later Tsars, if not Peter the Great himself, were to be made aware.

Peter was an Occidentophil, so much so that almost anything traditionally and characteristically Russian filled him with rage. It was not that he hated his country though he did at times show signs of completely misjudging its people. It was rather the anger which fills a man when he sees his best friends making fools of themselves. Willy-nilly, he forced his people to adopt all sorts of manners and customs that were foreign to them and did nothing to help forward Peter's Westernizing mission—except perhaps in that they empha-

sized that he was breaking with the whole of the past. It was this urge that drove him to pass his edict against the wearing of beards and national costume—an edict that was enforced ruthlessly and with needless severity. Yet this law, ridiculous though it may appear at this distance of time, was later used by Peter, with typical improvisation, as a means of raising money.

Finance was, as always, the greatest problem Peter had to face, and his methods showed that lack of co-ordination which marked all his endeavours. Here again he cut away most of the traditional system. For the old household tax he substituted a tax *per capita*, to which the peasants, rather grimly, applied the name of 'soul tax'. He believed that, as there must inevitably be more individuals than households, a head tax would be more profitable. He had reckoned without his own actions. Ruthlessly he had drained the country of men for his wars and his schemes of construction. That alone made it impossible for the tax-gatherers to collect anything like the estimated yield of the tax. And its imposition had the effect of accelerating the already marked renewed tendency to 'scatter' from the severity of Peter's decrees. At no time did this new tax, the basis of the budget, show any signs of bringing in a sum even comparable to that expected.

Yet money had to be obtained and recourse was had to penalizing impositions. Peter hated the Church but he hated the dissenters—particularly the Old Believers—more: no doubt because he had no authority over them at all in spiritual matters. Accordingly he made all nonconformists subject to double taxation. He realized that, despite his decrees, there were some who still persisted in wearing beards and appearing in their old national costume. These too he put under double taxation. He taxed baths. He even taxed coffins. Even in the act of dying, therefore, the Russian had to yield service to the State. In that at least he was consistent.

The enemy of all tradition, the crusading leader of modernity in Russia, Peter was, paradoxically enough, able by these and similar means, to maintain one of the strongest features of the policy of the Muscovite Tsars: when he died there was no national debt of any kind. Considering the complete lack of settled financial policy this may be counted one of his greatest achievements, for his wars and his reforms were alike costly.

It is possible to trace the pragmatic drive in all of Peter's reforms. He has been described as a pioneer of education, particularly in its higher branches, but this is to overstate the case. Peter was not a man of culture, even in the sense that Ivan IV had been. His attitude to education was still 'Will it work?' He left nothing undone to

stimulate the study of science in its then known forms—because it was by the application of the new scientific knowledge of the day that he was realizing his dreams. So large was the corps of translators he employed that there must have been few, if any, contemporary scientific theses not rendered into the Russian tongue. When he sent his subjects abroad to study—typically by decree and whether they wished it or not—it was to the shipyards and the factories and arsenals rather than to the Sorbonne, to Heidelberg, or to Oxford. And the foreign experts who were brought to the country had this in common with those who flocked to Soviet Russia during the N.E.P. period and the First Five-Year Plan: they were in the main practical men. In many ways Peter anticipated later Soviet developments. His reform of the alphabet again was not that of a scholar but of a man keen on obtaining results with minimum trouble. It remained, when he had done with it, the old Slavonic alphabet with all those redundant letters which were to remain until the Soviets dispensed with them; only its form was altered to one less decorative and more 'functional', in the modern cant phrase. The new alphabet was designed for the quick printing of books easy to read. The old alphabet was the work of the leisured scribe working for readers who liked to linger over their manuscripts like a connoisseur with good wine.

Perhaps the most remarkable of Peter's reforms indicating the complete mastery over him of the Western idea was the way in which he dragged Russian women from the Byzantine seclusion in which they had existed. There is evidence to show, from the letters written by him on his tours abroad, that he did not approve even of the limited part women then played in life in Western Europe. The instinct of the despot in him was too strong to make him take easily to anything that suggested equality. In his heart he must have felt sympathy with the resistance his decrees encountered. It came from all sides, and it was not weakest among the very women whose status he sought to raise.

It would be possible to write a whole book on the various items of Peter's reforms and innovations; and indeed that has been done not once but several times. What remains here is to give a slight sketch of their general effect—and of their legacy.

Peter created a new Russia, but he did not kill the old. Thus he emphasized that fundamental disunity which had dogged Russia for so long and continued to do so till modern times. He forced Russia into the concert of Western nations, but he did not fully prepare the country for the new responsibilities it had to bear; and this fact was to weaken Russia, despite her military success under his leadership,

till the time of the Napoleonic wars. He tried to travel too fast and too far, and he left behind a people weary and disillusioned, a people above all puzzled and suspicious.

The Western world, because it has been the centre of growth of modern civilization, is at times apt to think that its way of life, its own peculiar methods and turns of thought, are inherently superior to all others. For this reason Peter's reign is regarded by most as a time of progress and development. In certain material aspects it undoubtedly was. Peter changed the face of Russia, if not overnight at any rate in four decades. He went far to reduce the handicap that the Tartar overlordship had imposed.

Yet also he strengthened some of the less admirable characteristics of Russian life, and it might well be argued that in so doing the debit side of his account is rendered more significant than the credit side. Under Peter the power of the Tsar became even more absolute than it had been before. He was the first to adopt the title of Emperor and it connoted something more than a mere change of formal style. He took the already rigid class system of the early Romanovs and, while simplifying it, made it even more rigid; for he reduced its main divisions to three, each with its own often conflicting interests and with the flimsiest of bridges between them. He confirmed and made stronger the power of land owners over their serfs, and he cut across the old Russian law principle, dating back to Kiev and Novgorod, that estates passed to all sons equally, substituting for it inheritance by one son, though not necessarily the eldest. Through all his 'reforms' runs the same pattern. He moulded authority on his own model, the principle of the strong man in absolute charge; and he did not stop to think that not all men in power might be similar to him. In him, gifts of energy, drive, and personality counterbalanced to some extent the defects of lack of vision, inability to plan consistently, and egotism. It did not occur to him that lack of vision is more common than energy, inconsistency than drive, and egotism than personality.

There was nothing liberal or progressive about Peter's policies. Under him the status of the people was depressed still further. They lost the few outlets of expression and power left to them. They became less than units in the State because the majority simply formed parts of big blocks of propertyless and rightless serfs. Peter founded the principle that the individual must give to the State, but he did nothing even to suggest that he realized the corollary: that the State in return must give to the individual.

And yet, by his very repression and all unconsciously—for the mere idea would have appalled him—Peter brought into being the

## THE RUSSIANS

slow-moving inexorable power of the people. He forced the peasants and the toilers back upon themselves and into themselves. He made of them an isolated nation within the nation—and moreover a nation more and more aware of its grievances and the injustice meted out to it.

It was to be long before that people was to find its full voice. But even before it was fully vocal its murmurings and its growlings were effectual in bringing piecemeal policies to naught, and in rejecting sops thrown to gain its favour. And in the end it was to be that people's revenge that toppled Peter's last successor from the throne.

## Chapter 12

# AFTERMATH OF THE GALE

Peter, with his dynamic passion for reform, had set the pattern of Russian life for very nearly two centuries to come. He may not have been a great reformer, in the sense that he rectified abuses and made his world a better place to live in. Far from it; in fact, in some ways his reorganizations had produced greater hardships and greater abuses. But all of them gave an affirmative answer to his besetting question, 'Will it work?' He had riveted the chains of serfdom on the people more strongly. He had slashed and cut at the privileges of the noble and land-owning classes. He had 'levelled', in the Russian phrase, with a hand of iron that yet seemed to hold the balance evenly.

But his test of the practicability and desirability of a course was only a temporary one. An expedient might be wise for one age and dangerous for the next. Peter had wars to wage, a capital to build, industries to establish. It was for these reasons that he adopted the principle of universal service. And within its limits it was a successful device. Certainly it is the bedrock of the policy of all modern countries in times of war and emergency. With the passing of the emergency, however, the policy needs modification—and the modification must be carried out impartially. It was just this absence of an impartial directing authority that caused many of Peter's most praiseworthy reforms to lead to an increase in the power of that very privilege he had sought to destroy.

Peter's immediate successors re-established the Romanov reputation for being nonentities. Catherine I, Peter II, Anne, Ivan VI, and Elizabeth, occupied the Russian throne in rapid and inglorious sequence. They may have added to the luxury and glories of the rapidly growing new capital of Petersburg, but they did nothing to develop the Russian State as Peter the Great had left it.

When Peter died Russia needed above all else a strong ruler who could refine and work the ore of the new state that Peter had dug. There were rich and promising veins in that ore; there was also much dross. A capable administrator as ready to destroy the evil as to nurture the good might have achieved, in fuller measure and in shorter time than was actually taken, Peter's ambition to make Russia a modern European state. But there was no such successor.

Acc. No. 16389

Russia Triumphant by, Sava, George.

914.7 SAV

It cannot be denied that some of these first Petersburg rulers had the wish to emulate Peter the Great. But they had not his ruthless courage and determination. They were held back not only by their own incapacity but also by their fear of arousing against themselves a similar hatred to that which Peter had inspired in the nobility and the people. There was to be no competent head of affairs in Russia until the time of Catherine II—Catherine the Great—a non-Russian and, in a sense, a usurper.

With weakness again at the top, the old motive of self-seeking that had been a blight on Russian development for so long reasserted itself. The Romanovs returned to their original function of being the tools of the nobility. But now they were a more powerful tool. Peter had established autocracy more firmly than ever. The Tsar's word was law. With him—or her—as their mouthpiece, all things seemed possible to those masters of selfish intrigue, the Russian nobility.

Peter had ground the peasants into unremitting serfdom. But he had treated the nobility no less harshly by insisting on their performing service equally arduous in its way. Under the stress of war and vigorous internal change—more than all, in virtue of Peter's own forceful will—these conditions were accepted with as good a grace as could be summoned. With Peter's passing the wars ended and there was no particular drive towards internal reconstruction. Service was no longer a necessity; and it was the first of Peter's innovations in the social structure to which the nobility turned their attention.

It was in 1725 that Peter died. By 1730 the land-owning classes had succeeded in relaxing the conditions of service in their own favour. In their efforts the nobility were aided by the fact that Peter's system of tax-collection—improvised, like all his measures—showed signs of breakdown through sheer inadequacy. Once more the land holders found themselves in the position of tax-gatherers. This, combined with their greater freedom owing to the mitigation of the service laws, enabled them to establish complete control over the land of the whole country. They owned everything absolutely now, including the bodies of the toiling peasants. It was the policy of Ivan Kalita again. The nobles became the one link between the final authority and the people.

Privilege once established almost always brings with it the idea of the closed corporation, the select body to which only those properly qualified can obtain admission. Russian society under the Romanovs, and particularly under Peter I, had become more and more divided into mutually exclusive classes. The land owners, by co-operation



and co-ordination of their policy—a new thing in Russian politics—intensified this trend. There was no longer any chance that one not born into the noble class could attain to it by enterprise or merit. And because there was no escape upwards the population outside the privileged class tended to drop downwards. The intermediate grades of society found themselves unable on the one hand to attain any higher status and, on the other, to gain a reasonable living in competition with the immense body of slave labour controlled by the land owners. Thus, as the years went on, the intermediate grades slipped into serfdom—and the power of the nobility was increased.

There was a definite change too in the status of the nobility themselves. Hitherto they had been regarded as the pool from which the officers of the Army and the higher administrators were drawn. This was particularly so under Peter and he was adamant in his principle of nobility through service. Now, controlling the land and its labour, forcing by their absolute power the embryo middle class into subjection, the nobility became agents of the Government. They represented the central authority, particularly in such matters as tax collection. To the peasants, in fact, the idea of a central authority gradually grew more dim. Their single idea of government was the person of their local land owner—though the notion of a shadowy Tsar in the background was retained and led to some curious distortions of thought in later events.

Final success came to these efforts at the establishment of virtual absolute power over the people by the nobles on the 18th of February 1762, on which day the manifesto known as the Emancipation of the Nobility was promulgated. From this sprang the great agrarian problem that was gradually to overshadow all other Russian affairs and was not to find solution for a century and a half.

The Emancipation of the Nobles, of course, did nothing for the peasants. For the land owners, however, it went far towards restoring their old privileges while still reserving to them the powers they had obtained under Peter and others. Service was no longer compulsory on any member of the *dvoryanstvo*—roughly ‘nobility’ or ‘aristocracy’—though the Tsar reserved the right of demanding service in times of national emergency such as war. Every other of the obligations that had hitherto been borne by that class was swept away. In fact, only one compulsory edict applied to the nobility: they were compelled to see to it that their sons were sufficiently educated to enable them to take their hereditary place in society—hardly an onerous burden.

It is surprising that those then in charge of Russian affairs seemed unable to visualize that in this edict were all the makings of a first-

class popular revolt. The peasants had been led to accept absolute serfdom without active protest by their being told that it was part of a compulsory service plan for all, high and low, rich and poor, alike. It had been stressed to the nobles by Peter that they had been given serfs only so that they might be better able to discharge their duties to the state. Now these duties were abolished. The nobles were placed in a position more privileged than ever before. Yet they were allowed to retain the consideration for which their original service had been bought. For there was no mention at the time—in Government circles at any rate—of emancipation of the serfs. The gross injustice of this was plain to the sensitive Russian peasant who, despite his ability to bear uncomplainingly the hardest of physical discomforts, has ever been highly discerning in matters of right and wrong, and possessed of an ingrained sense of proportion that has often put his alleged superiors to shame.

The Emancipation of the Nobles was the last rivet in the chain of serfdom. The final and heaviest link had been closed. From now and for a hundred years more, the Russian peasant was the absolute property of a class that enjoyed entirely unrestricted freedom of action. It is not to be wondered at that this edict was greeted with uncontrolled rejoicing by the nobility. Their long fight had been won, and they were the complete masters of Russia. At this time all things seemed within their reach. The Tsar of the period, Peter III, was, in a word, an idiot. He sought to buy popularity by every sort of concession, even to the extent of limiting the power of that standby of autocracy, the Secret Police. But he almost invariably discounted the value of his public acts by his private conduct. If he moved towards a liberal outlook as, for example, by abolishing some of the disabilities imposed on those who were not members of the Orthodox Church, he revealed his own intolerance by his contempt for the work of that Church, and thus tended to lose the support of one of the props of government. He brought his army to the point of open mutiny by a policy of slavishly copying the methods of his contemporary, Frederick the Great of Prussia. And it was this last piece of incompetent tampering that sealed his own fate. He had, by his own acts, created the conditions for revolution. It came. Not a people's revolution but a palace revolution, yet for all that a palace revolution that sprang from widespread popular support.

In rallying the Royal Guard and ejecting Peter III, Catherine the Great was acting—though perhaps unconsciously—as the agent of a people oppressed and irritated beyond endurance. Catherine had little right to the throne beyond the fact that she was the wife of Peter III. She was German, but she had perfectly adapted herself to

the country of her adoption. In turning to her the ruling class in Russia, acting for the one of the rare occasions in their history as the mouthpiece of the people, were exercising an ancient right of freedom that the Russians had never abjured—the right of electing their own ruler. There were others—Ivan VI who had been deposed and put in confinement, and the eight-year-old Prince Paul, whose hereditary claim to the throne were greater. But they were not wanted. Russia felt instinctively that after a period of weakness and chaos, a period during which all the worst ingredients of Peter the Great's mixture had been intensified, strong and capable administration was needed. Catherine, by her personality and her natural gifts, had shown herself likely to provide this.

Catherine the Great was not great in the sense that Peter I was. She was thrust on to the throne, the choice of her nobles and the Army. And in much the same way she was the symbol of her times rather than their moulder. If Russia went through a period of greatness under her rule it was not so much because she wrestled with destiny as Peter had, but because she, a child of her age, was attuned to and could respond to the spirit of the times. At the commencement she was frankly liberal. She had come under the influence of the English and French philosophers and gave lip-service to their ideals of freedom. She even showed signs of interpreting them mildly into terms of Russian affairs. Then the crash of the French Revolution echoed throughout Europe and rumbled round the now many-palaced Petersburg. The warning was sufficient. Her liberalizing tendencies were stopped in full flood, and she became the perfect Russian autocrat. Yet she did immense good to Russia. Peter had thrown open the window and let in the west wind. It had blown in Catherine, a seed of a Western plant that became acclimatized to Russia and blossomed freely. Peter brought the materialistic triumphs of the West to Russia, making that country a great power and laying the foundations of its industry. Catherine, by her own example, cultivated the graces of thought and philosophy. Not only had she taste herself; she had the ability to make others recognize it.

For all that she was a refining influence in the life of Russia and she was responsible for some notable detail-reforms in administration, Catherine did little enough for the people. It was one thing to discuss politely, after a good dinner, the implications of the *Rights of Man*. It was quite another for an autocrat whose very tenure of the throne had been seized by force to translate those philosophical maxims into practice. She summoned a great Legislative Assembly and drew up for it rules which so shocked her ministers

that they had to be revised lest revolution follow. But her reign was marked by the great rebellion of Pugachev which, with a nominal legitimist aim, was yet popular in origin, promising freedom to the serfs; it came near to setting the whole country ablaze. Estates were seized, land owners fled, troops sent out to quell the riots mutinied, murdered their officers, and joined in the rebellion.

This was one of the crises of the Russian nation, one of those sudden upwellings of the old Novgorod spirit of freedom that punctuate the long and flowing sentences of Russian history. Like those that went before, it was doomed to failure. The time for breaking the autocratic, or even the aristocratic, power was not yet. The Russian people had not served their apprenticeship in the arts of government and expression of view. Their intrusions into the affairs of the state were largely uprushes of passion that swept all before them by sheer violence in their initial stages and afterwards collapsed because passion is not a sustained driving force. In a sense the rebellions that looked so promising in their early stages only prepared further scourgings for the people. They excited the ruling powers to measures of repression no less cruel and passionate than the acts of the rebels. And these acts of retribution fell upon a people worn out after attempting a task beyond their present powers.

Catherine's reign saw the expansion of Russia in many directions. 'Little Russia', the borderland of the south, was brought finally under the Russian aegis, and the Cossacks were forced, with one or two minor exceptions, into complete subservience, so that many of them became the agents of the throne. The First Partition of Poland occurred. The international prestige of Russia was both advanced and consolidated. It was indeed a time of greatness. And from Catherine's time the voice of Russia was listened to with ever-growing attention in the councils of the world.

This period then may be said to have put the coping stone on the edifice begun by Peter the Great. But it was not the building he had planned. He had been succeeded by architects who had not understood his plans and who had preferred to amend the master plan by their own fanciful variations. Thus, fundamentally, it was an unsound structure, sure to break apart when time and age had done their work.

It was a period too in which the most important development was the concentration of unlimited power into the hands of a ruling class. The Emancipation of the Nobles was effected in February 1796. It marked the end of an era. Catherine seized power in July of the same year. Her deeds and achievements are the first fruits of the new dispensation.

## AFTERMATH OF THE GALE

But the most significant thing about the Emancipation of the Nobles was that it was an end deliberately worked for by the nobility as a whole. It was, in the modern phrase, a class movement. There had been perhaps greater opportunities in the past. Tsars had been elected by the nobles, and those Tsars had established greater and greater autocratic power simply because their nobles had no sense of co-operation and were prepared to consider their individual immediate interests before those of their class as a whole.

It was Peter's sheer ruthlessness that had forced on them enlightenment. He wielded a power greater and more absolute than theirs. He was deaf to cajolery. If he granted a privilege he made sure that that privilege was paid for at, or a little above, the full market price. Only combined resistance and sinking of the self into the class cause could counter such measures.

This new realization enabled the nobles to attain their ends under the succession of weak and incompetent rulers who followed Peter. That work was completed when these same nobles were able to put, in Catherine, their own nominee on the throne. Catherine would not have had the power, even had she had the wish, to break the stranglehold that this newly united class had established on Russia. The Army, by the direct aid of which she had carried out her bloodless revolution, was utterly dependent for its key personnel on the land-owning class. The whole finance of the country was in the same hands; she could not obtain a penny for state affairs without the good offices of the nobles. Her only chance of maintaining her position was by identifying her interests with those of the aristocratic class. She could not appeal beyond them to the great mass of the people—the peasants who, no longer masters even of their own bodies, toiled and sweated in the fields, winning for their superiors the latent wealth of the country.

Thus the pattern of modern Russian emerged. At the centre was the Tsar, now the Emperor—*imperator*—round whom was the great class of nobles and land holders. These latter supplied the main strength of the Army and the official classes. There was a high wall of privilege between the central government and the people and there was no gate in it. Indeed, when an attempt was made to cut such a gate the strength of the whole structure was undermined and it began to crumble.

And the strength of this wall was due to the fact that throne and nobility had identical interests. It was not only tradition that bound the ruling class of Russia in loyalty to the Tsar. Neither could exist without the other. For if the Tsar was helpless without the power and money that the ruling class supplied, that class would not have

## THE RUSSIANS

lasted a day without the pathetic faith of the people in the status of the Tsar as the 'Father of His People'.

The west wind had blown and it had disturbed and removed many of the cobwebs that had clogged Russian life. It was not only fresh air, however, that it had brought. It had littered the Russian scene with wreckage which was not to be cleared up for many a long year. Some of it indeed still lumbers up corners of Russian life. The legacy of Peter has been long and lasting, and that is because the faults of Peter were Russian faults. His mistakes were Russian mistakes, springing from the strength of his Russian character, his identity with the Russian psychology. Catherine, by her non-Russian origin and by her influence in focusing the eyes of the ruling class fixedly on the West, made certain that there could never be another Peter while the Romanov dynasty lasted. The fate of the Romanovs was that they forfeited their Russian heritage and had not the strength to find for it a true substitute. When from some inner prompting they tried to turn again to their people—as Alexander the 'Emancipator' did—they failed because they had lost all understanding. They became, in one sense, far more foreigners in power than ever the Varangians were.



## THE SECOND LOYALTY

**T**wo intertwining threads run through the rope of Russian history, one so broad and heavy that, for the greater length, it practically obscures the other. This latter thread is that of the Kiev tradition, the tradition of absolutism and slavery. The other is the thread of free Novgorod, symbolic of that no less strong tendency of the Russian to be his own master. To the first, subsidiary threads were added from time to time, giving it greater strength. The adoption of the Orthodox faith increased the hold of authority a hundred times, so that the Tartars found that their harsh, despotic rule was not altogether unfamiliar to the Russian people.

But the lighter thread never broke. Now and again, as we have seen, a turn of the rope brought it into view. So it was a butcher who raised the flag of revolt to end the Time of Troubles. So it was Pugachev—an ordinary Cossack—who put into deeds the unspoken words of anathema uttered by the people against the Emancipation of the Nobles.

It was one of the crassest of the mistakes of the Tsars to ignore this thread. They judged the rope by the thickness of the other strand and were surprised when the whole rope proved less resilient, less extensible, than they had imagined. And even when it came prominently into view they did not recognize it fully for what it was.

These two strands make up the main line of Russian history. Much is made clear if one remembers that behind almost all internal events is this background of the interaction between the traditions of Kiev and Novgorod.

With the reign of Catherine the scene for the drama of modern Russia is almost set. But there is one other influence in Russian life that has to be traced, one that so far has been only lightly touched. That is the influence of the Church.

In all European countries the Church was immensely powerful until comparatively recent times. Time and again it played a decisive part in history; and indeed the history of the Dark Ages and the early Middle Ages is very largely the history of the Church, as that of the late Middle Ages and early modern times is of the gradual emancipation from the power of the Church. So far, therefore, it



might seem that there is no particular reason to stress that the Church in Russia has exercised a determining influence on events.

To compare the Church in Russia, however, with the Church in Western Europe is not merely to be guilty of fallacy but also to open the door to all sorts of misconceptions. The Russian Orthodox Church has occupied a peculiar place in Russian history and in its relations with the people. More even than the Western Church at the height of its power it has been a controlling factor; and it retained its hold over a much longer period. Its strength has been shown by the fact that it has stoutly resisted even organized attempts to extirpate it under the new régime and has, in fact, found new life as an independent body owing allegiance only to itself.

It is not simply the political position of the Russian Church that makes it specially important; it is also the fact that the development of Russian thought, particularly on religious matters, shows within the Church that curious dichotomy of viewpoint, that ceaseless interaction of two traditions to which attention has been continually drawn. It is, in fact, impossible to understand clearly Russian development as a whole unless the unique character of religious life in Russia is grasped.

Christianity came to Russia, like most things, by decree. And also like many innovations in Russia it was accompanied by not a little bloodshed and compulsion. 'All Russian régimes', says Sir John Maynard, 'have been sudden and arbitrary'; and this applies as much to the introduction of Christianity as to the reforms of Peter the Great or the inauguration of the collective-farm policy by the Soviet Government. Vladimir conceived the possibility of converting a whole nation to a new creed almost overnight; and so far as forced baptism and conformity could assist him his aim was achieved. There was no steady growth of Christianity among the early Rus, though many had embraced the faith long before Vladimir issued his edict. The conversion was an abrupt act of state, dictated, as we have seen as much by political reasons as by ethical ones. Indeed the political motivation was probably far the stronger.

There are two points about the conversion that are vital to remember. One is that there was this forced conversion, no doubt often against the personal opinion of the masses, who were quite content in the worship of their ancient gods, whom they understood and who had the immense prestige of tradition behind them. The other point is that the religion imported was the Byzantine brand of Christianity, a brand that had had infused into it even more of authoritarianism than the Western creed and that was intimately bound up with the claims of the Byzantine emperors to be absolute in

## THE SECOND LOYALTY

all things. The Orthodox religion has been defined as a fossilized form of Christianity in that it holds true to beliefs formulated and living many centuries ago. Even when it came to Russia it was already fixed and formal, and the spark of reason in it, of living belief, was dead. Christianity, like the world, had been made once for all by God. It was only the heretics of the West who indulged in the blasphemous belief that there could be any sort of evolution in these matters. It is curious that even at the time the Reformation was sweeping Western Europe and the reformers were denouncing Rome as the repository of outworn superstition, the Church of the East still continued in its ancient ways and regarded that same Roman Church as a thrice-damned innovator and cursed distorter of God's Holy Word as explained for all time by the Fathers.

In Western Europe the Church, because it was more international in character, worked gradually towards the conception of itself as a sort of superstate. It claimed the right—and did not on occasion hesitate to exercise that right—of being superior to the dictates of sovereign princes who, in its view, merely ruled over provinces that owed fealty to the greater kingdom of God's Church of which the Pope was head. This was a constant source of friction, but it did tend to separate the ecclesiastical from the political power.

In Russia it was otherwise. The Orthodox faith came to Russia at the behest of the Russian ruler. It owed its existence to an act of state. Thus it never claimed any overriding powers. It might exercise a more universal power than the ruler of Kiev or Novgorod—so much so that 'being Orthodox' was for long the one conception of unity. But in this it was merely a forerunner of the Russian state that was to be. When the Grand Princes of Moscow created that state the Church was a part of it. Implicit in everything was the conception of the Russian Church as being the repository of the true faith, which it did not share with other countries. And it was this which emerged clearly into the light of day when, with the fall of Byzantium, Moscow proudly claimed to be the Third Rome.

Church and State became in Russia so closely intermingled that it became difficult to say where the power of one ended and that of the other began. If the Tsars sought the blessing of the Church for their actions, the Church, no less, turned to the Tsars for support. Only occasionally—as for example, in stirring up the rebellion that ended the Time of Troubles—did the Church act independently. And even on this occasion it was forced to do so because that central authority on which it relied for temporal support had vanished. The Church was not then acting as a revolutionary agent. It was, in reality, fighting for a restoration of that *status quo ante* without which its

own existence was imperilled. And it was also being true to its traditional role of unifier. It took no overt sides in the many-angled disputes then going on between rival claimants to the throne—though it may have eventually favoured one candidate and ensured his eventual success. Its appeal was for unity in the interests of the Russian Land and the Russian Church—the Land of Destiny with the One True Church. The distinction is not merely one of words.

There is also more than a passing significance in the fact that this Orthodox Church came to the country at the invitation not of the people but of their ruler. It was a nominee of the Grand Prince of Kiev. From the first, therefore, it had a strong connection with the ruling authority and as time went on that connection became ever closer. It was Ivan the Great who used the Church as his chief weapon in his fight for suzerainty over the whole of the Muscovite territories. It was he who brought the Patriarchate to Moscow and, appearing in public as the First Son of the Church, became in effect that Church's unacknowledged director. There was a constant interplay of influences between Government and Church. The two reinforced each other, covering the weaknesses of each other, and emphasizing their joint strength.

By the time of the early Romanovs the Church had become a powerful vested interest, with a point of view practically identical with that of the great land owners. The monastery system was strong in the Orthodox Church, and so remained until the Bolshevik Revolution. But there was little similarity between the monasteries of the Orthodox Church and those of the West. The latter, in their prime, were the guardians of learning and culture. They were at their best practical exponents of the law of Christian charity. From them sprang the hospitals and what we should now call social services. The Orthodox monasteries were different. They had inherited, through Byzantium, many of the traditions of the *Thebaid*. A man retired to a monastery not so much to do good works as to live a life of humiliation of the flesh and seclusion from the world. There is little record of social endeavour by the Orthodox monasteries. They were primarily centres of religious emotion (in their purest form) and had little or no contact with the outside world. And they took no part in the ministration to the people.

But the line of development in both East and West tended to become similar. In the West the monasteries forgot their social significance and acquired wealth. In the East the monasteries gave only lip service to the curious rites of self-mortification of the *Thebaid* and grew into great land-owning corporations. They had

## THE SECOND LOYALTY

their slaves and their serfs. They were as jealous of their rights and privileges—as land owners—as the most self-interested individualist.

The theme might be expanded, but enough has been said to show that from the start the Orthodox Church was both an integral part and a department of State policy. Even Peter the Great, for all his reforming zeal and his detestation of the form of the Church, could think of nothing better than to clip the wings of this dark bird and put it back into the cage of State supervision from which, since its intrusion into major politics during the Time of Troubles, it had shown an inclination to wander. This is one more aspect of the truth that in many ways Peter was a reactionary, reaching back into the past as often as grabbing at the future. He fastened the bonds of the State on the Church, it is true, and thus superficially brought it within the ambit of his new conception of the State. But he was only re-tying old bonds that had become a little frayed. He was doing nothing new. The same spirit had actuated Ivan the Great in the early days of Muscovy.

The principle of autocracy, the grading of classes, was implicit in the Church's own organization. The monks were the Black Clergy, and from them alone might promotion to the higher ecclesiastical offices be made. The parish priests were the White Clergy. They, unlike the monks, were free from the law of celibacy and were in fact expected to marry—usually to daughters of other parish priests. Since these White Clergy were themselves dependent on what they could raise from their impoverished flock their case was hard. Their main revenue came from the trifling fees their parishioners could pay for such services as baptism, weddings, burials, and special masses for the dead, or celebrations on saints' days. They came in time to be largely a parasite class battenning on the peasants and, unconsciously perhaps, despite their humble origin, they acquired as a result a tendency to identify themselves with those classes which, on a larger scale, also grew fat on the sweat of the peasant. There were, it is true—and no one would deny it—splendid parish priests in the Old Russia. But in the main the White Clergy were illiterate and of a low standard. They were men with no hope of advancement, condemned to a routine life and necessarily obsessed with the idea of clinging closely to their hosts of the moment.

The Early Church was a people's church. It was the humble and lowly who met in the catacombs and there laid the foundations of the typically Western faith. But the Orthodox faith had long forgotten this origin. It was the faith of the Emperor. The titles of the Emperor had descended on the Tsar. It became in every sense a church of the ruling class, more so even than the Church of Rome

because it could lay not the slightest claim to autonomy or independence of the civil power.

Yet it was with the Russian people a second loyalty, perhaps even greater than that owed to the Tsar. In some mysterious way this universal faith that bound the Russian of the north to the Russian of the south satisfied that feeling of communion with one's fellow-being which is one of the mainsprings of Russian character. When the western Slavs deserted the Orthodox creed and gave allegiance to Rome, it was this which built up that barrier that still exists between, for example, the Russians and the Poles, Tsars might come and go,—as in fact they did, sometimes with surprising suddenness—but that did not matter overmuch. Novgorod had shown that it is in the Russian to have little respect for rulers. But the Church was eternal. The Church had the riches that were greater than the riches of the land owners. The Russian craving for dependency here asserted itself. On the physical side, it accepted serfdom almost without a murmur. On the spiritual it accepted the dictation of the Church. For any Slav to forgo that dependency was something worse than sin. It was a crime against the inmost sacredness of Man, a denial of true instinct.

Deep in the heart of the Russian peasant there has always been a yearning for a saviour. The Russian's way of life has been hard. In his nomad days he fought his way through forests and swamp, bitter enemies that only his fine physique overcame. He submitted to the slave system of the Varangian monarchs of Kiev and to the no less brutal republican masters of Novgorod. He bowed his neck to the Tartar overlords. He gave up piecemeal that little fragment of freedom which even the despots of Kiev had granted him—his right to till land for himself. He had learnt suffering, submission, and humility in a tough and bloody school.

And this had brought with it a curious conviction that, though all this tribulation passed on from generation to generation, it was really in the fundamental scale of things transitory, and that one day a saviour would come to strike away the fetters to which each new age seemed to add new weight. He came to believe, against all the lessons of experience, that there was hope in the Tsar as the great leveller, the Prince of all before whom noble and peasant alike were equal and to whom peasant and noble must give equal service according to his ability. Above all, he saw a saviour in his religion. At times he came to identify the peasant with the suffering Christ Himself. There was nothing feigned about this humility. It runs like a *leit-motif* through a great deal of Russian folk-lore and the poetry that derives from it. It was as though he took the message of the Church

## THE SECOND LOYALTY

and transmuted it through the lessons of his own suffering and made of it something nobler and grander. It is this humility, ingrained, natural, entirely unaffected, which has enabled the Russian people to bear so much.

But it had its weaknesses. It may be given to the meek to inherit the earth, but it is also the meek and the humble by whom the exploiter exists. And the meek do not stand up and defy authority. So it was that the Church maintained its hold for so long over the Russian people. It held them back by its own conservatism, its static confidence that it was the only legitimate offspring of the First Rome and its adherence to formulas that were old when Vladimir's proselytizers set out from Kiev. When the Russian armies were drawn up for battle in the early days of 1914, ikons were paraded before them and they made the sign of the Cross. The Russian Church did not decline. It cracked and crashed suddenly when the tornado of the October Revolution struck it, like a building from which all the mortar has powdered away. And in falling it displayed all its accumulated rottenness and the spuriousness of the jewels it had held up to admiration for so long.



## FREEDOM IN FAITH

**T**he hold of the Church on the people, its endurance through times of turmoil and trouble, its constant appeal to the sense of unity in the Russian, is only an incomplete, and perhaps the less important, part of the picture it is desired to draw. The Church came from Kiev. It was Byzantine. And just as the Kiev and Byzantine elements fused into the typically Russian conception of the Tsardom, so did the Church satisfy the instinct of the country for its own form of authority.

Yet as we have seen, authority by itself represents but a half of the Russian character. There is too the tradition of Novgorod, of fiery freedom and denial of authority, except such as pleases the governed, an urge to express the will of the people more violent at times than any encountered in reputedly democratic lands. That spirit was crushed time and again in the political sphere. In the realm of religion it found its full expression. And it is beyond doubt that this fact accounts for the seemingly inexplicable acceptance of conditions utterly unbearable to the people. If the desire for political freedom was thwarted and repressed, it found satisfaction in religious freedom of the most extraordinary kind.

The religious life of the Russian peasant has, in fact, been a continued paradox and a more curiously lush field of extravagance. It has brought out some of the most striking traits of the Russian character, traits that have never died out. One can trace them in an intensely concentrated form at work to-day in the Soviet Union, though their direction has been changed and the object of their attention strikingly altered.

Let us remember first that the Russians had Christianity thrust upon them and that the Church was, from the first, a masters' organization. The people were baptized—by order. They attended the new churches of Kiev—by order. They conformed to new rites—by order. There had been no missionary endeavour to bring them into the congregation by free choice. Probably the idea that the ordinary Rus peasant, who sold so well in the human markets of Byzantium, might have any power of free choice was beyond the conception of a Grand Prince descended from Varangian pirates.

Old religions do not die overnight. Modern Christianity is full



of survivals and adaptations of more ancient cults. Pantheistic classical Greece has contributed more to the Christian ethic than many bishops care to admit. The folk-lore of all nations is, to a greater or less extent, a survival of beliefs and customs older than the Cross and rooted more deeply in the soil of the instinct than the Catechism and the Creed.

And so it was in Russia. When the water of baptism marked the brow of the new convert, it did not seep into his mind and wash away the memories of the ancient gods who had served him and his forebears for so long. The Rus peasant was a simple man; and simple men relinquish old habits reluctantly—especially when those habits have seemed useful to him. He could not imagine that, simply by word of the Grand Prince, all his old deities had died overnight. Nor had he any power to imagine that all their lives he and his father and his fathers' fathers had lived a lie. He told himself that he had sacrificed to his gods and they had blessed his fields. And if he was no scientific believer in the laws of cause and effect, neither, for that matter, were the early prelates of the Church. Without inner conviction, the curious feeling known as religious experience, one creed is as logical as another.

The old deities did not die. They were still at work, still as powerful as ever. But little by little their status changed. The God of the Church was a good God. The old deities were cruel. So in course of time they became transformed into evil spirits. Their evilness was increased by their anger at being deserted by their former adherents. Their constant task was to revenge themselves for the desertion. Therefore it became necessary for the Rus to placate them. If now they did not seek their gods' positive help they still endeavoured to buy them off.

Nor was this persistence of the old rites in a new guise a mere temporary phenomenon natural in a simple people. It continued down to recent times. True, the peasant of the nineteenth century had probably never heard the names of the ancient gods that had protected—or tormented—his distant forefathers in the river valleys round Kiev. None the less, he still wove their stories into his superstitions and his tales of the saints. Peter the Great fulminated against these pagan practices, but even he could do nothing to stop them although he promulgated a solemn ukaz condemning certain rites and condemning to punishment those who followed them. Here he was challenging something much more powerful than himself.

So the typical peasant religion became a curious intertwining of ancient pagan beliefs and Christian dogma. The Orthodox creed with its plethora of saints and its mass of apocryphal legend provided

fertile ground on which this strange hybrid could flourish. And it led to some curious results. The *pop* or parish priest was regarded with reverence but also with fear, because his very presence roused the resentment and ire of the evil spirits who had once been gods and claimed the full allegiance of the people. If the *pop* was present at a wedding—well and good. So at a funeral, at a baptism, at a church festival. But on other occasions he was best avoided. If he brought holiness he also was liable to bring evil. It was no more than common prudence to be wary of transactions with the parish priests.

On a far greater scale than the peasants of Western Europe, the Russians transferred to the saints of the Orthodox Church the attributes of their old gods. Sometimes a mere similarity of name was sufficient to suggest the identification, as when Saint Vlas was endowed with all the qualities of the ancient god Volas. But the origins were forgotten. It was the practices that lingered. A Protestant observer might have called them superstitious had he encountered them in their final stages, yet unless he had been an expert he would hardly have suspected their purely pagan genesis.

Not all the apocryphal stories told of the saints, however, were of the same class. Some were frankly expressions of the peasant's sense of humour and his desire to parody the more sententious aspects of the Orthodox faith.

It was in this way that a popular religion, distinct yet linked to and deriving from the official Orthodox creed, sprang up. How real it was is shown by the fact that, with rare exceptions, the *pop* was never the guide, philosopher, and friend of his parishioners that the rural vicar was apt to become in Western countries. The *pop* was a professional man with certain essential services to sell. One could not be baptized, married, or buried without his aid. He was the one person with the power to conduct certain services that were necessary to the health of the soul. Hence his relations with his people tended to become purely commercial. He was as anxious as any business man struggling to make ends meet to get the utmost for his services. The peasants, eking out a miserable existence, were no less anxious to pay as little as possible. There is no small likelihood that this attitude between *pop* and parishioner helped to keep the old superstitions alive because it served to keep the parties concerned at arm's length.

This special form of religion was one more thing that tended, as time went on, to separate the peasant from the upper classes, who in the main accepted the tenets of the Orthodox Church, not only through tradition but also because the Orthodox Church was part of their mechanism of power. When, therefore, the final division of the Russian nation into two great classes, the governors and the

governed, the free property owners and the landless serf-peasants, was finally effected, the peasants unconsciously were ready for the change. They began in truth to see themselves as distinct and different from other Russians. It was a terrible realization, for it cut right across that spirit of communion represented by the constantly recurring Russian word *subornst*, which is so near to the Russian's heart and soul. The Russian is gregarious. Isolation of any kind embitters and angers him. And in that fact is the key to many curious aspects of Russian history, both recent and remote.

The depth of the religious feeling of the Russian people is shown by one of the major events of Russian history—the Raskol, or Schism. Its immediate causes were comparatively insignificant. There was nothing about them that superficially could have led to results so far-reaching and enduring. The Church in Western Europe was reformed far more fundamentally than the innovations—or rather historical corrections—that brought the Schism into being. The significance of the event arises in fact from two main causes, to which the actual reforms merely gave the opportunity of expression. The first was the Russians' urge to spiritual freedom, one aspect of which has just been discussed. The other was the split in the hitherto complete unity of the Church—that unity which, however superficial it might be ethically, was very real in giving the Church its power to command the confidence of the people and ensure the relatively good behaviour of the Tsars.

In 1659 when the Tsar Alexis was on the throne, the Patriarch Nikon issued a revised version of the prayer-book. Intelligent churchmen had long recognized such a revision as necessary, for many corruptions had crept into the ritual, mainly as the result of the low level of scholarship that prevailed in the Church as in all Russia. Previous amendments had, in fact, been made but passed unnoticed and Nikon's immediate predecessor, the Patriarch Yusef, had set up a commission to undertake a thoroughgoing overhaul of the whole of the services.

Nikon's revision, which had the fullest and personal support of the Tsar, himself deeply interested in these problems, was no mere personal whim or an attempt to impose a purely personal reading on the Orthodox communion. It had been carefully made. Not only Russian but foreign scholars had been engaged on the task; and it seemed that the new forms would be accepted as right and proper.

But established religious feeling is a risky thing to tamper with in any country, and especially so in Russia. Revision of the text of the services was unimportant, partly because the bulk of the congregations barely understood what was intoned by the priests and

they were unable to read for themselves, and partly because it was not these things which interested the Orthodox community. It was the outward symbolism of the faith that had come to be the chief symbols of the people and these, no less than the wording of the Scriptures, had come in for the reformers' attention.

Nikon had been at pains to bring back the practice of the Russian Church as nearly as he could to the Greek originals. He reintroduced the Greek method of making the sign of the Cross, using three fingers instead of the two employed by the Russians; and it was this, minor affair though it may seem, which precipitated a schism in the long-united ranks of Orthodoxy and led to the firm establishment of dissent in Russia. And so with the other immediate causes of the Raskol. Nikon tried not to innovate but to restore what scholarship had shown to be the original pure practice of the parent Church of Byzantium.

There is no need to follow these changes in detail. The examples given show both the nature and the extent of the 'reforms'. They were certainly no greater than those introduced by Henry VIII when he first broke with Rome; and those changes were really of a far more fundamental kind, though they left the forms unaltered. And they aroused no real resentment.

But slight causes yield often the greatest results. So it was with the Raskol. It developed into something more than a theological dispute. It became the centre of a conflict that was to be dragged out for years and to claim many bloody sacrifices.

There were plenty of honest Orthodox ready to defy the new order. They were neither narrow-minded nor ultra-conservative. They were prepared to accept variations in the wording of this scripture or in that. But they held strongly that the Orthodox Church was the Russian Church, that the practice of the original Byzantine Church had little or nothing to do with the practice of the existing Russian Church. These Old Believers, as they became known, were not fighting—at any rate openly—for the mere preservation of forms. They stood first for autonomy of Russians over Russian affairs; secondly for the right to practise their religion as they had been wont to do; and thirdly for the right of the people, the Orthodox community as a whole, to resist what seemed to them the capricious innovations—however sound historically—of one man.

Viewed in this light the Raskol is seen to be something deeper than a mere squabble over formalism. And it must have been sensed that something greater was at stake than the relative merits of using three fingers or two in making the sign of the Cross. Otherwise it is difficult to see any reason at all in the blood bath that followed. For

if the Old Believers refused to accept the new amendments, the established, conforming Orthodox were insistent that there should be no dissent. Moreover they had the resources of the State at their side. The Church was part of the State, one of its foundations. It was risky to shift it. Perhaps they saw too that the identification of Russia with the Orthodox was in the balance. If dissent were allowed then who could say with truth that to be Russian meant to be Orthodox and vice versa? Where then would be the claim of the Third Rome?

It is not necessary to describe the senseless butchery that followed the attempts to force conformity on the Raskolniki. It will be sufficient to give an example or two of the edicts issued and the events that occurred, which were in the most barbarous Russian tradition. The Raskolniki were forced from their homes and took to flight; and in 1687 the Tsar instituted a nation-wide campaign against them. 'When they (the Raskolniki) were heard of, a body of armed men should be dispatched in pursuit so that their refuges might be discovered and destroyed and their property confiscated, and every man, woman, and child apprehended in order that their abominable heresy might be exterminated without any chance of survival.' So the ukaz. It was no more effective than the fires that burned in Mary's reign in England. So for thirty years the hunt was up, decree following decree, edict following edict, and each more stringent, demanding fuller penalties than went before.

Captured Raskolniki, like Protestants before the Inquisition in Western Europe, had the choice between only two courses. They could recant and accept the new books; or they could elect to be burnt at the stake. By this time feeling was running high, and the Raskolniki showed all the self-sacrificing zeal of religious martyrs, as though they themselves were the pioneers of a new faith instead of the upholders of the old. It was not merely that the majority preferred the stake to recantation. They gloried in self-immolation in their own cause. From all over the country came tales of the great 'lockings up' in which thousands of Old Believers perished. The Raskolniki would take refuge in some monastery favourable to them, in a church, or in a house, and from there defy the forces of the Church which came to reduce them. When at last further resistance was useless they would fire their own refuge and perish in the flames. At one place on the shores of Lake Ladoga there were two such events, and in each of them one thousand five hundred perished. The total who lost their lives by this sort of fanaticism and by the hands of the torturers and executioners of the Tsar and the Patriarch must have run into many thousands.

But the fight was becoming unequal. The Raskolniki could not be

subdued and even the arbitrary Russian power found itself growing rather ridiculous in its unsuccessful efforts which merely served to inflame the enthusiasm of their victims. The Raskolniki made good use of the Russian Land. They scattered all over its vast spaces and pursuit became hopeless. So efficacious was this centrifugal movement that even in the nineteenth century villages existed that were not known officially and which were virtually independent communities of Old Believers. It was to this widespread scattering that the Tsar owed many of the later outposts of his empire.

The reforms of Patriarch Nikon are in themselves unimportant. But their effect on Russian history is profound. These innovations roused all that part of the Russian character which is impatient of control and which likes to express itself in fast and sometimes catastrophic action. Commencing as a purely religious movement of protest—there can hardly be any suspicion that the original Raskolniki had the slightest idea of the strength of the reaction they were pioneering—the Raskol became a symbol of freedom and of resistance to oppression. Peasants, debtors, victims of every kind of ill treatment joined the Raskolniki in their marches into the unknown hinterland. Some found their way to the Republic of the Don Cossacks, where the writ of the Tsar and the commands of the Patriarch were alike ignored. Others penetrated beyond the Urals into Siberia. Though they were true to their faith, these migrant colonies were fulfilling a higher destiny. They were pioneers of the cause of liberty of conscience in Russia. They were leaders in the cause of pitting the people's will against the autocratic decrees of central authority. If the spirit that animated them had been inspired by a deeper cause, such as the question of peasants' freedom, it is probable that these fiery souls might have created the first major Russian Revolution and achieved something which Peter himself found beyond his power: the formation of a strong and virile public opinion.

The fervour of the Raskolniki's belief did not abate with the years. It was they who denounced the Tsars and particularly Peter the Antichrist, and they forbade to their followers all dealings with the central government which they saw as the agent of the devil upon earth. They remained for many years a thorn in the side of the Russian Government, and though later, terms between the contesting parties were reached and dissent was legalized under disability and loss of privilege in certain cases, a new force had been unleashed in Russian life.

It seemed new because it had been lying dormant. The very violence of the Raskol outbreak is a measure of the strength of the



## FREEDOM IN FAITH

innate yearning for freedom and of the fierceness with which that yearning had been suppressed. Here was the spirit of Novgorod welling up again. It was the Novgorodians who did not hesitate to show their president the road when he displeased them and to imprison their archbishop if it seemed to them that his views were unwelcome. The Raskolniki were the heirs of this long-obscured tradition, and they grafted on to it something stronger: an implicit statement of the freedom of the people to do right by their conscience even against the orders of the Tsar.

Nor was this all. The Raskolniki had split the Church. They had weakened the authority of that Church. Thus they appealed to that sense of independence in religious matters which was so strong in the Russian people as a whole. By showing that the Church could be flouted and its protector, the State, set at naught, they encouraged the development of the originality of the people in matters of faith. This was to have some curious and, in the end, decisive effects on Russian destiny.

In a sense protestants themselves—though champions of an older form of faith—the Raskolniki could not oppose splits and schisms within their own ranks. They had indeed opened the way for them by focusing attention on theological matters, by organizing public debates on them, and insisting on the appeal of reason in affairs of the spirit. It was not long before groups began to break away from the original Raskolniki. The pace quickened and it was not so very long before all manner of strange sects appeared on the Russian religious scene. The wandering holy man became a feature of Russian life exercising an immense power over the people—and eventually over the Tsar himself. For it was one of this line—Rasputin—who became counsellor to the last Romanov and spoke to him with the voice, as he imagined, of the people. By this devious route the Raskolniki settled the fate of an empire and ushered in, two centuries after, that major revolution which they themselves might have forced in their own time and on their own ground.



## THE EVER-FLOWERING TREE

**T**he Raskol set men thinking about religion. It put an end to the rule of absolute authority in ethical matters. In view of the suppression of thought and action which marked every other aspect of the mouzhik's life, it was no more than natural that he should turn all his imaginative powers into the new field opened up to him. For there was no need to defy authority openly in order to attain independence in religion. For centuries the peasants had had their own brand of religion quite different from that of the official church. What they gained now was the impetus to break away from tradition and to find their own solutions for problems in their own way and according to their own genius.

It is not surprising that many of the new sects that sprang up all over Russia in a spontaneous outbreak were based on extremely queer ideas. Some of them were familiar echoes of heresies and theories that had roused endless argument in the days of the early church. Others were indigenous to the Russian soil, drawing partly from the inherited tradition of paganism and partly from the immediate conditions of peasant life.

There was no stopping the growth of these sects. First of all the Raskol split into one or two main groups. These in their turn broke into smaller groups, which again subdivided. It can be likened only to the process of cell fission among the amoebae. For centuries the Church in Russia had remained a single body. Once fission started it continued at an ever-increasing pace. By the eighteenth century contemporary critics estimated that there were more than two hundred strange sects throughout the Russian domains; and it may safely be guessed that for every one known to the authorities at least one more led a hidden but none the less vigorous life in one part or another of the country.

Probably the greatest single figure in this extraordinary religious revival was Danilo Filipovitch, the founder of the Khlysti, which became one of the strongest and most numerous of the various sects. The name Khlyst was a corruption of the name Christ, which was adopted by the early members because they believed in the Messianic mission of every true believer. But the word *khlysti* is not

## THE EVER-FLOWERING TREE

itself a mere corruption: it signifies 'whips'—and whips these zealous religionists turned out to be to the authorities.

Founded with the purest motives and with the intention of bringing men nearer to the truth, the Khlysti developed by their very enthusiasm into an ecstasy cult. Their nightly worship was marked by dancing and self-hypnotism on a mass scale, by singing and rhythmic chanting, by flagellation and penance. These sessions ended more often than not in unrestrained sexual orgy, and indeed this was often encouraged on the ground that only those who had sunk deep into sin could obtain true redemption. There could be no redemption for the sinless for they had never tasted temptation.

Various minor divisions of the Khlysti soon appeared and there was a great difference between the practices of the various groups. In some a form of matriarchal rule was adopted. In others polygamy was accepted. Haeterism was not unknown. On the other hand certain groups went to the other extreme and condemned all forms of family or sexual life. They went as far as ensuring total abstinence of all kinds by bodily mutilation.

The Khlysti did not long remain even nominally a compact, unified body. Each of the various interpretations of the new freedom took a name of its own. Thus the ecstasy dancers became known as the Skakalzi (Jumpers) and the more extreme school of ascetics took the name of Castrati (Skopzi).

Yet though these offshoots differed greatly and between wide extremes in their individual practices, they did share one central belief in common—the original Khlyst doctrine of incarnation. Christ, they contended, was continually reborn and dwelt among men—and not only Christ but the other Persons of the Trinity. The Spirit of the Godhead might at one time be shared by several men in different places. At others its essence might be concentrated on one outstanding holy man. The Holy Ghost, it was contended, dwelt in every true believer during the time of worship.

These sects commanded immense popular support. Even those who did not actually practise their doctrines held the holy men themselves in considerable awe, because they were held to be possessed of special religious qualities. Just as in the old days the local sorcerer was regarded as of rather greater importance than the parish priest, so now the local Khlyst came to be a figure of importance. If authority took the sternest measures to repress these wanderers who went from village to village preaching and practising their curious rites, the peasants were in the main sufficiently impressed by the spiritual standing of the hunted to give them shelter and food.

There was no ordination of the holy men. It seems that one would

suddenly feel the urge to take the road and preach the message of the Khlysti. To him, it was said, had come an incarnation. And his family basked in a certain amount of reflected glory. The wandering priests were beggars, but they never lacked. They would live in the woods or in the cottages of the peasants who were prepared to give them shelter. They laughed at the unavailing efforts of authority to catch them, because they knew that they had the greatest shield of all—the sympathy and protection of the people. In them the old nomad spirit of the Russian revived and strengthened.

It is necessary to glance briefly at the conditions of the main body of the Raskolniki—the body that did not bud into ever stranger and ever more exotic flowers. Here too there was fission. One group became known as the Popovtzi. These retained the priesthood and were in fact the direct upholders of the ancient Russian ritual. Their one quarrel with Tsar and Church was over the new missal. The other section was entitled the Bespopovtzi, or priestless people. The difference between them turned on the point of the apostolic succession, and there is much similarity between their problem and that of the validity of the Orders of the Anglican Church. It is not a matter of great importance here and the division is pointed out only to make the picture complete.

The importance of the whole business does not lie in the extravagance and originality of the various sects, notable though they are in their demonstration of the remarkable peasant capacity for organization and speculative thinking. The point that overtops all else is that the Raskol sowed the seeds of revolution. It was the contention of the whole of the Raskolniki, whatever their particular creed, that the Tsar was Antichrist and that any dealings with him and his government meant the soul's damnation. The Raskolniki refused to pay taxes, to be numbered by the census takers, to obey the laws laid down for their conduct. One result was that the zealous were forced to become wanderers across the vast face of Russia since no community could house continuously such outstanding rebels. Thus they spread the doctrine of civil disobedience further and further. Certain sects reached a compromise attitude based on the principle of acceding to the civil power when the dictates of the latter did not conflict with conscience. This was a later development, arrived at when the notion of a personal Antichrist embodied in the Tsar weakened.

The central government never altogether came to terms with the Old Believers, though persecution lessened as the years advanced and the idea of religious tolerance spread. But even in the nineteenth century the position of the Old Believer, whatever his particular creed, was inferior to that of foreign Christians in Russia and even

## THE EVER-FLOWERING TREE

of the practisers of non-Christian religions like Judaism and Muslimism. And the Church itself never forgot the slight put upon it by the success of the Raskol. If it was possible to humiliate or punish the Old Believers the opportunity was taken. And though in practice the Raskolniki were left alone in the last century of Tsardom, the laws against them remained—ready to be put into force at the whim of the Tsar or, even worse, of some minor official anxious to make an impression.

One of the last and most glaring cases of official persecution was the arrest of three bishops of the Raskol. They were faced with the alternative of imprisonment or renouncing their claim to hold hierarchic rank. The latter they refused to do. This was held to be tantamount to an assertion on their part that the Raskol priesthood was the equal of the Orthodox one, and the three bishops were forthwith cast into the prison of the Suzdal Monastery, where they remained for a quarter of a century—from 1856 to 1881, practically the whole of the period of the reign of Alexander II, the 'Liberal' Tsar. It is a tribute to the constancy of the Raskolniki that they suffered their disabilities patiently and that there were very few who returned to the Orthodox Church. Only during the brief time of parliamentarianism in Russia did Old Believers in fact attain to positions of state.

For two centuries therefore, from the Raskol to the Bolshevik Revolution, there were wandering about the country men of fire and conviction who believed in the freedom of the spirit and in the assertion of an individual point of view. They were not revolutionaries in that they tried to inspire open rebellion. Yet they were all the more dangerous to authority for that very reason. The Khlysti, for example, remained for the chief part practising members of the Orthodox Church. It was only at their private festivals that they demonstrated their curious powers. From these men the Russian peasant learnt the lesson of outward conformity and secret dissent. They acquired the power of co-operation in managing their own affairs. They learnt not only to think for themselves but also to question the rulings of their masters. They saw whole communities which, by courage and resource, deliberately flouted the tax-collector and the government official.

This was a first course of revolution. It gave self-confidence to a people that might easily have lost all self-respect in the conditions under which it lived. And it kept alive that spark of liberty in the Russian character which was to be fanned into the flame of freedom.

It is the educational and political side of the Raskol that is of supreme importance in Russian history. The religious and doctrinal

side is of interest too, but its importance in development is relatively low. The student of contemporary religion and psychology may find much of significance in the practices of the sects—in the echoes here of Buddhism, there of ancient heresy, somewhere else of paganism. He may correlate the psychological repression of the people with the extraordinary escape into the freedom of religious thought, which was like a tree putting forward ever new flowers, miraculously unlike those that had gone before. Yet all this did little to alter the way of the mouzhiks' thought. It was the mere fact of freedom of life and expression, of the constant practical lesson of independence, that paved the way for the events of the Emancipation and after. The wandering holy men spoke with the voice of the people. Nicholas II, last and most pathetic of the Romanovs, was not the only Tsar who came to believe in one of these holy men as the inspired representative of the mouzhiks he had never understood. Authority had found its opposite in anarchy, suppression in exotic freedom. It was a milestone in the history of a people.

## Chapter 16

# MOUZHIKS' MIDNIGHT

Catherine's reign was in no sense the dawn of a new period. It was rather the culmination and fulfilment of the greatness of Russia which Peter had promised. Catherine was an able woman, but she was never entirely sure of herself. She always referred her judgements to outside authority—not that of a parliament or an elected council representative of the people, but to the philosopher who happened for the moment to be most popular with her. If her reign is regarded as a great one for Russia it is rather in the realm of external achievement. No great reforms or readjustments took place under her rule. On the contrary, it was the golden age of the aristocracy who, with Catherine's backing or perhaps her tacit acceptance of the *fait accompli*, established a stranglehold upon the economic life of the country.

Under Catherine the Great the serfs reached the nadir. It was the mouzhihs' midnight. Complete serfdom had been in existence long enough for many of the older memories to be obliterated. The land owners had forgotten the time when the peasant was nominally free at least. They had settled down to their position as absolute arbiters of their serfs' lives. And they were strong enough to disregard those pathetic safeguards which had been placed on them in their relation to their property. As in old Kiev, the wealth of a man was apt to be gauged by the number of serfs he owned, and not by the acreage of his land—for obviously a man with a small area of rich land worked by a large number of serfs was better off than the colonial land owner with vast tracts of country and insufficient labour to work it properly. Ambitious men married their daughters to the young members of wealthy houses who had the greatest number of serfs to distribute as dowries. It might almost be said that among the ruling caste serfs had become a new unit of currency, more important than the rouble or the primitive method of assessing possessions by herds.

As for the peasants themselves, it is clear that this was the darkest hour of their despair. The last hope had gone. The Church was no longer on their side and showed itself in fact among the more prominent of their oppressors. The Tsar—or rather the Tsaritsa—was an ally of the ruling class. There seemed no one to whom to turn for succour.

## THE RUSSIANS

But the ferment was at work. The dark days of Catherine had the effect of making the peasant realize more clearly than ever before the terrible straits in which he was placed. He became conscious—acutely conscious—of a condition that, though hereditary in him, he had taken before for granted. This was his land hunger. As a serf he was allotted a small piece of land for his own cultivation, but this was not his. It was often inadequate, the odds and ends of the master's estate with which little could be done. In the past he had always had his land, rich or poor, and he had held on to that land because he tilled it and caused it to bear crops. Now with this miserable plot he was there merely on sufferance.

The old Russian attitude to the land reasserted itself. The land holder might have complete control over the peasant's body. The peasant would shrug and accept it philosophically, as his forebears had taken the Tartar overlordship. 'What can't be cured must be endured' might well be a Russian peasant motto. But the right to work the land was his own, and no master should come between him and that right. If he worked the land and it was fruitful then he had the one inalienable right to it. That had always been so in Russia, from the time of Kiev onwards. It had tended to be obscured in later years. The peasant wanted land—land for himself and his family; and he was ready to work for it. Indeed work was his own right to it. It could not be given to him for ever merely by legal act or transfer.

Under the Russian serfdom laws an allotment system was in force. To each household the land holder assigned a certain strip and the serf was allowed so much of his working time to cultivate this for his own use. The rest of his time was the landlord's and had to be freely given, with reward of neither food nor pay. Every obligation of the master to his man was held to be covered by the grant of the right to work a certain strip of land.

If these conditions had been properly fulfilled, it is likely that there would not have arisen that bitterness which marked the whole of the Russian agrarian problem. The peasant, with his peculiar outlook on land property, might have accepted it as a fair exchange, for centuries had taught him that there was not much value in his nominal freedom—the only thing he had lost by the serfdom laws.

But the system was never in any widespread use. And as the power of the aristocracy rose to its climax in the Emancipation of the Nobles on the eve of Catherine's accession, conditions grew steadily worse. The land allotted to the peasants grew less and less. Worse still, the time allowed to them for its cultivation was made shorter and shorter. The rare instances of good treatment of serfs—as, for example, the provision of free food and lodging when the master demanded long



## MOUZHIKS' MIDNIGHT

hours of work—merely throw into relief the rapacity of the average serf owner.

The plight of the mouzhik grew so bad that at length the Government was forced to intervene. An edict was issued laying down what constituted a fair allocation of time as between cultivation for the master and cultivation for the peasant's own livelihood. It was laid down that three days each week should be allotted to the tilling of the home strip and three to free labour for the landlord. The seventh was the traditional day of rest, dedicated to God.

On the face of it, it was a fair arrangement, but it did not appeal to the landlords at all. The practice of forcing the serfs to work for four or five days—and sometimes even six—continued; and the ruling class were now in a position from which they could regard even the imperial ukaz with disdain when it did not suit their interests. In many cases Sunday was the only day in the week left to the unhappy serf to do the work that would provide himself and his family with sustenance. That meant Sabbath-breaking, the disapproval of the Church, and possibly penalties. Whatever he did, the peasant found himself walled in by rules and regulations that fettered his every movement.

Quite apart from official intervention, however, there was a force at work that did help to keep the landlords' demands for ever-increasing free labour somewhat in check. Even a serf owner has to have some regard for the health of his property. A serf worn out is no good to him. Moreover a serf is a commodity that cannot readily be replaced. There was then, after Catherine's reign, some tendency to observe—though not through any respect for the official law—the three-days' labour rule. On the other hand, the length of each working day was increased to the uttermost. And the serf owner did not hesitate to employ his legal right to use the lash to extract the last ounce from his unhappy workers.

In dealing with this subject one is forced to generalize. And it is necessary to recognize that generalizations are always dangerous. That there were good serf owners who did their utmost for their workers cannot be denied, just as in the cotton plantations of the Southern United States there were good and humane slave owners who did all they could, if only from economic motives, for those whose bodies they owned. But the conditions as outlined here do represent the average state of affairs. It cannot be denied by any apologist that the conditions of the Russian peasant under serfdom attained a depth of degradation to which few peoples have descended outside states of the most barbarous culture. Nor must it be forgotten that the whole existence of serfdom creates an attitude of

disrespect for humanity. That one man should possess the complete rights of disposal over another is one of the fundamental wrongs.

There is a strong streak of sadism in the Russian temperament. It is impossible to deny its existence. Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, and even later Tsars, were all capable of the grossest and most unnecessary excesses, simply, it would appear, from an inborn drive towards savagery. And this trait was not confined to Tsars alone. Russian revolutions have all been brutal in some of their aspects. Probably the condition arises out of a constant interplay of suppression and an erupting desire for freedom. The powers conferred on the serf owner encouraged this streak of sadism to develop. And a warped psychology allied to an economic urge cannot but produce appalling conditions.

But it is necessary to be fair. It is admitted and indeed asserted that serfdom was an evil thing, responsible for many of the troubles of later Russia, the effect of which can still be traced. The other side of the case must, however, be stated, especially if the failure of the Emancipation is to be seen in its true light.

Some sort of compulsion was vital if the basic industry of agriculture was to be saved after the Time of Troubles. The Russian peasants' nomad tendencies have had to be held in check by some means as, in the past quarter of a century, the Soviet Government has discovered. From the time of the first Romanov onwards Russia was undergoing a period of expansion which reached its twin peaks under Peter and Catherine.\* It was then necessary to conserve the national strength. And in the atmosphere of arbitrary rule that existed in Russia, the exchange of a problematical freedom for a settled serfdom did not seem too harsh a move to make.

Under Peter's rule of universal service to the State there was in fact some justification of serfdom from the purely practical standpoint and leaving all moral questions on one side. The fault lay in the attitude of the ruling class. They could have made serfdom tolerable and paved the way for reform of a situation regarded as a temporary expedient. Or they could have taken that course which, in fact, they did take of exploiting this situation created for their own benefit.

There is reason to believe that under the rule of universal service the peasantry did not actively resent serfdom. Moreover the facts about the mouzhik himself must be realized. He has been idealized by the Slavophiles. The sentimentalists have always found in the peasant, no matter what his country, a figure round which to build idyllic legends. What is the truth? Until recent times—very recent

times—the mouzhik was far from an arcadian figure. He had advanced little if anything beyond the stage of barbarism, and it is probable that there was less difference between the sturdy Rus slaves sold by Kiev and the peasant at the time of the Emancipation than between the 'free' peasants of Alexander II's reign and the peasant university student of modern Soviet Russia. The typical mouzhik was illiterate and brutal. He recognized little authority other than that forced home by the whip. He had grown up in a hard school and had respect only for hard masters.

In stating that fact it is not forgotten that the responsibility for this condition did not lie with the peasant himself. He had no opportunities of advancement except those which exceptional individuals made for themselves. The Church, which in some countries saw to popular education and worked steadily for an increase of culture, was in Russia concerned only with the teaching of a blind obedience to authority of which it was at once the ally and the agent. Each new edict, each new stratification of society, forced the peasant downwards and increased the barriers between the peasant and those classes, whether aristocratic or commercial, from which he might have benefited.

These are important points because they indicate one of the per-versities of Russian development. In Europe generally there was a gradual upgrading of the classes. In Russia there was a progressive simplification of class structure which depressed the lower grades and brough fresh power to the upper. It is for this reason that the Raskol—and particularly the popular sects that sprang from it—is so important. Through this means were provided for the mouzhik for the elementary lessons in freedom of thought, as has already been stressed.

Serfdom reached the depths it did in Russia because it occurred in Russia. This is no pleonasm. The conditions of serfdom were a direct expression of the general national psychology in the country. It was the Russian habit to concentrate power and not, as in democratic countries, to diffuse it. And there was no tradition in Russia of responsibility or collective obligation. From the Grand Princes of Kiev to the Grand Princes of Moscow, the one ruling principle was personal advantage. Peter was the first who conceived the idea of a state greater than himself, to which he and his subjects must alike give service. And Peter was probably in his time the most unpopular Tsar who ever sat on the Russian throne. His ideas did not permeate the ruling class, because Peter, true to the Russian tradition, gathered all the power to himself and did not delegate it to a group that might have nurtured the new ideas he was trying to cultivate. When his

personal power died, there was left a ruling class armed with power but unaware of responsibility.

That the serf owner had any responsibilities towards his serfs, apart from those of keeping them in the minimum condition in which they could labour effectively, was the type of argument that would, in theological terms, have been regarded as the rankest of fatal heresies. And if there was no sense of responsibility in regard to their immediate property, the appreciation in the value of which might have been considered as of some importance to them, it can hardly have existed in any larger form. There was absolutely no inkling of the idea that the peasant might be educated to take a larger share of responsibility and become a more useful servant to the State. His sole purpose was to labour.

Any suggestion that education and enlightenment of the peasant might benefit Russia as a whole—and therefore the land holders—would have been dismissed as a revolutionary attempt to rob those land holders of their prescriptive rights. 'What we have, we hold', was the slogan up to which they lived. They would relinquish nothing on which they had laid their hands, either honestly or dishonestly.

And the attitude of the land-holding serf owners did much to undermine the very basis of Russian agricultural prosperity. There was no attempt at orderly agriculture, except in the best-managed estates. The notion was held that deficiencies in management could be compensated for by the employment of more and more labour. Management cost money and time; labour was free and could be dealt with as desired. Thus with the dawn of the nineteenth century Russian agriculture was approaching a state of chaos. The richest grain-bearing belt in Europe was subject to repeated harvest failures at ever more frequent intervals. Famine, ever the bugbear of Russia, with its vast spaces and its thinly distributed population, became an even greater nightmare. It was the peasants' revenge, unconscious and almost complete. As the serf owner was tearing from them their power of work so they, by their forced labour, were ripping from the land they tilled its fertility and richness.

During the reign of Catherine there might have been some hope of an alleviation of conditions. Her wide liberal sympathies, particularly with the French school that immediately preceded the French Revolution, might have caused some to believe that she might turn her theories into practice on the problem nearest at hand. But she was largely in the hands of the nobility, whose interests were nobody's but their own. And she was never sufficiently sure of herself to challenge her advisers on any major matter of internal policy. Catherine, like Peter, turned her eyes outwards away from Russia.

She brought part of Poland under the rule of the Tsars; she engaged in adventures that expanded the Russian Empire eastwards. In a sense she gave the final shape to modern Russia. But she could not, or would not—for she was obviously a clever and discerning woman—see, as Peter did, that external policy must go forward hand-in-hand with internal policy, that the success of the former depends upon the strength of the latter. When the French Revolution broke, during the last years of her reign, she followed the path of so many Russian Tsars who have shown liberalism in their early years: she became violently reactionary, fearing that any moment her own people might demand of her the same sacrifice as the French had asked of their rulers. With that the last hope of early emancipation evaporated.

But the midnight of the mouzhiks' night was passing. If dawn did not come at once, at any rate the world was spinning towards the sunrise. In various ways the pressure of the mounting popular feeling was beginning to be felt. The first growlings of the storm were sounding, far off but unmistakable. The peasants having sunk to the bottom were now starting to rise again. The hunger for land had become unendurable and a growing consciousness of their ultimate power was making the peasants' voices stronger. Memories of the old freedom—not the pseudo-freedom that immediately preceded serfdom, but the real freedom of the remote past—rose again.

With Catherine's death in 1796 the long march towards emancipation began. It was to be a trying journey involving hardships that caused some to wonder if it was worth while. It was to lead down cul-de-sacs. And it was a journey still in the making when its whole course was altered by the October Revolution.

The cry for emancipation was rarely openly voiced by the peasants. No peasant leader rose to demand before the country the return of the elementary rights of which the mouzhik had been robbed. But for all that it was an unanswerable cry. There was no one in the whole of Russia who was unaware of it.

This was one of the occasions on which the voice of the Russian people spoke in its own peculiar way, when the terrific weight of the people's will forced itself through the barriers that separated the peasant from the circles of the Tsar and his Government. It was an elemental force, one that could not be denied or diverted. The peasant believed in his own personal freedom. He believed in his right to as much land as he could till. He did not believe, as some would have it, that his labour was his own and that he would not work for others. That is a great mistake that has been too often repeated. And millions of other peasants held identical views.

## THE RUSSIANS

This massive force accumulated. By rumour here, by direct statement there, by the growing interest of the intelligentsia in the conditions of the people, it sapped away the walls of oppression and suppression. There is no need for parliaments to put into words and fine speeches unanimous aspirations such as these. They are all the more impressive by their very speechlessness. There is a true democracy about them which does not need the devices of party politics or platform appeals. There was one problem and one answer to that problem. The peasant was insisting that it should be made.

## Chapter 17

# THE FALSE DAWN

Catherine the Great was followed by Paul, who more than restored the traditional Romanov reputation for incompetence and nullity. He in his turn was succeeded by Alexander I, one of the most famous names in the Romanov line, for Alexander was the Tsar of the Napoleonic wars, a man who gave to Russia a power in international affairs she had not hitherto possessed. He had gone far towards lightening the burdens that had lain for so long and so heavily upon his country. He restored some vanished freedoms and added new ones. Liberalism was in the air and Russia, now a leading member of the Great Powers, could not be entirely unaffected by it. At home the intelligentsia were turning to their own country for inspiration—and finding much in it as strange and unbelievable as anything they could have found in the remote places of the world. What they reported did not seem to accord with the general trend towards liberalism in other things. Thus the demand for all-round reform, for modernization in fundamentals as well as in the superstructure, grew more powerful.

But Alexander I, like Catherine, had his period of reaction. He suddenly felt that he had gone too far, that the only effect of his concessions was to give greater opportunity to his subjects of taking advantage of him. In the later years of his reign he became the traditional absolute monarch ruling first for himself and then for his immediate circle.

Alexander's death was followed by a brief interregnum, during which the Decembrist rising, engineered by dissatisfied guards and other officers of liberal sympathies, occurred; and in 1825 Nicholas I was proclaimed Tsar. Nicholas was a curious mixture. His education under a French tutor had given him a wider background than that possessed by most Tsars, and he had mixed with young officers who, having been to France, were eager and anxious for reform in their own country. But he was also supremely conscious of his own authority and of its importance in the scheme of things. If he recognized that reforms of many kinds were needed, he had very clear-cut ideas of what constituted reform and what merely revolutionary idealism. He was no believer in the rights of the people or of their power of self-determination.



His coronation manifesto went to the very core of his attitude. 'Not by insolent and always destructive dreams are the institutions of this country to be perfected, their shortcomings made good, and abuses corrected. We shall accept with goodwill every modest expression of a desire for improvement, if it implies improvement that shall be gradual.' Earlier he had expressed his conviction that reforms of whatever kind must 'come from a legally constituted authority'—these being reforms that he contrasted with other kinds undertaken by people 'on their own initiative' and using 'God alone knows what kind of methods'.

These declarations were a clear warning for the advanced thinkers not to expect too much of a man who might legitimately have been thought to be a reformer. They expressed too his determination that reform, where necessary, must come from the top and not spring from any kind of popular movement, however inspired. Nicholas from the very first had no confidence in the people. He believed only in himself. By the end of his reign his distrust had intensified and he became reactionary in every way. He took away those small reforms which his predecessor had granted and would listen to no argument on his decisions. Nicholas I was a conscious autocrat. He held to autocracy as a matter of philosophical belief. Thus it was that he endeavoured to introduce in larger measure his personal control into all the aspects of government, including the rudimentary cabinet, the Council of Ministers, that was now playing its part in the central government.

Nicholas was not the Tsar to listen to the demand for emancipation of the serfs. The mere fact that such a demand came from below and was not originated in the palaces of St. Petersburg automatically condemned it. Moreover he knew nothing of the lives of the people. He was the Tsar. The people existed only as some undefined mass that paid taxes and brought forth crops from the soil and products from the factories. If he made tentative advances in the direction of reform it was only to shatter the hopes of the liberals, for Nicholas usually ended by devising a 'new' system that ultimately succeeded only in aggravating old abuses.

Yet not even the repressive attitude of a Nicholas I could hold back the growing demand for the abolition of serfdom. Indeed his reign, which lasted from 1825 to 1855, marks the period when the demand spread from those immediately concerned and their few intellectual supporters to practically every grade of society. Even the land owners themselves were beginning to find their serfs something of an embarrassment. There had been a large increase in population and the problem of finding work for all the hands was acute. More-

over, conditions were changing. New methods of agriculture were needed if the land was to be kept in full productivity, and the ruling class, not itself composed of practical farmers (as the English squirearchy had been) was not only incapable of taking advantage of these innovations but was also precluded by its heavy obligations from raising the necessary capital.

Crisis was approaching rapidly. And it was a crisis that would have been bad enough without the problem of millions of disaffected serfs. Land was mortgaged. New scales of values were being adopted. The gentry saw new fields for their activities. But while the serfs remained nothing could be done. What had once been an asset—the most prized asset of all—was now a liability. And it was a liability that could not be dealt with by the method of cutting one's losses.

The land owners' solution of what seemed like an impasse was characteristic. They were quite ready to lend all their powerful aid to the cause of freeing the serfs. But they must retain full control over all their present land. Only thus, so far as they could see, would the reform be profitable to them. The idea of reform for reform's sake, reform in the interests of the state and its people, was beyond them. No doubt they saw in their scheme a method of retaining all their existing advantages without the concurrent drawbacks. If they retained the land the serfs would still be dependent on them—but not as property. The conditions of economic slavery would replace those of actual serfdom.

There was one other circumstance that indicated the rapid approach of the storm centre. The peasants were becoming openly restive. Nicholas I reigned thirty years. In those three decades some six hundred peasants' risings occurred—twenty a year on average. Moreover many were serious. It is recorded that of these six hundred more than half could be broken only with the aid of the military. The land holders were growing alarmed, not only for their immediate prospects but also for the safety of their own persons.

Even Nicholas I could see that there was something urgently needing attention. He appointed secret committees to discuss the matter, but it is not recorded that any evidence was taken from any representative of the peasant class. And there was a distinct handicap to any movement for reform in that there was no unanimity among the land owners. It is hard to part with a hard-won privilege, even when that privilege seems less lustrous than it was when new. So it was that the majority of land owners, when it came to the point, preferred to retain their privileges at all costs rather than relinquish something that had still some uses. Moreover nothing could be discussed in the open. It would have been wrong to encourage the

peasants in their already regrettable hopes and thus run the risk of provoking further and more serious disturbances.

The result of all these long deliberations, of setting one profit against another and endeavouring to arrive at the balance most attractive to the land owners, was an edict of 1842. It was a small mouse to have been produced by so weighty a mountain in labour. It provided that land owners might, of their own accord, release such peasants as they wished and allow them the use of any land they cultivated in return for a money payment or a contract of labour. If there had been any compulsion about this it might have relieved the tension by granting a small first instalment of freedom to certain peasants and providing a means whereby land owners could reduce the embarrassing load of dependent labour they were carrying. A cynic might have regarded it as a second edition of the emancipation of the nobles, rewritten in the terms of a more economic age. Nicholas I would have nothing to do with compulsion. He said that even an autocrat could not order a land owner to enter into a contract. The remark is significant.

The act of 1842 was, as might have been expected, abortive. Yet it is not without its importance. This was not the first occasion on which permission to release serfs had been given to the land owners. In 1803 similar concessions had been granted but without the land clause of the 1842 version. It was clear that even the Government of Nicholas I was alarmed at the state of the peasantry. It viewed with alarm the creation, by law, of a vast mass of landless workers, insistent on the right to employment and livelihood. A small step had been taken towards the final act of the emancipation.

Another small step was taken in 1847 when collective powers were granted to village communes to buy themselves out as wholes under certain conditions. Those conditions arose when the estate to which they were attached was auctioned for debt. It is a sidelight on the times. More and more estates were falling into the hands of those who had advanced money on them and a frightening prospect of thousands of ownerless serfs loomed before the central and local authorities.

Even with the opposition of Nicholas still strong it was now clear that it was only a matter of time before freedom with a grant of land for livelihood would be granted to the serfs. Where the problem was less hedged about by vested interests, more or less rapid progress was being made. In the south-west, where only Polish land owners hostile to the Government were concerned, emancipation was effected as it was in the provinces of Old Poland proper. So too in the Baltic states emancipation had been accomplished earlier, but opposition

at court held back the full implementation of the reform in the latter part of the country.

It was in the closing years of Nicholas's reign therefore that pressure of public opinion—though still without formal means of expression—began to drive the most autocratic of the modern Tsars in the direction of reform. Nicholas was obstructionist and his whole sympathies were on one side. He identified himself with the interests of the land owners and would consent to nothing, however equitable, if it seemed to take away from that powerful class any substantial privilege.

So it was left to Alexander II, Alexander the Emancipator, to complete the work which his father had begun. Alexander was misunderstood by his people. They could not see him for what he was—a man convinced of the need for reform and carrying that reform through to the best of his ability even when it went against his inborn tendencies. For he had something of the autocratic stubbornness of his father. His strength lay in the wide political training he had had—a new feature of the education of a future Tsar. At one time he had been a keen upholder of his father's views, but he was wise enough to accept the force of actual events. The system of Nicholas was beginning to break down. Alexander's mission, as he saw it, was to cast off his old love and begin to put something in its place before he was left with nothing at all.

Alexander was a realist rather than a born reformer. He was one of the few Romanovs—if not the only one—who was prepared to face a fact, assess its importance, and act on the logical inference. He came to the throne at a time of difficulties, disillusion, and imminent disaster. He acted decisively. He made peace in the Crimea, and then set about establishing internal order, for the lack of which that war had very nearly ended in debacle. He made a gesture to his people by lifting the more oppressive of the burdens his father had imposed. For the first time Russia enjoyed a moderate degree of Press freedom; liberty of movement overseas was restored to Russian citizens; the number of the universities was augmented.

These and similar actions were, like Peter's reforms, inspired by no settled policy but by a desire to act swiftly in staving off impending crisis. He was neither in a hurry nor anxious to tackle the fundamental problems of the country, of which the greatest was serfdom.

It is clear that he had not made up his mind on this thorny problem in 1856, a year after his accession. He called a meeting of the land owners in Moscow and personally addressed them. What he said indicated clearly that he had not yet screwed up his courage

to the sticking-point and was reluctant to take action with the one authority that would make it effective. 'It is better', he said, 'to begin the abolition of serfdom from above than wait until it begins to abolish itself from below.' It was an invitation to the land owners to set their own house in order. But it had a greater significance. It admitted publicly that the Tsar himself now regarded emancipation as inevitable and that, in the long run, measures must come from the central government itself.

There was, of course, no response to this half-appeal. Every inducement for them to act was held out to the land owners, but they held back, unwilling to the last to make any concession and concerned ever with their own privilege. It was not for them to admit mistakes or to bow to the inevitable. If the Tsar felt that emancipation was necessary, then it was for the Tsar to act. Whatever followed—were it disorder or even revolution or sheer dissatisfaction—would be on the Tsar's own head. There is nothing like autocracy for sapping the power of decision among lesser authority.

Alexander himself could not make up his mind on the course to follow and his ministers were equally undecided. The land owners themselves could present no agreed policy for implementation. But at last, after weighing the various plans put forward, the Government took its decision. The date of emancipation was announced. And the terms seemed—on paper—to be precisely those which the peasants themselves had been demanding. There was to be a limited expropriation of land from the land owners, and it was to be distributed in equal shares, based on the number of 'souls' per household, to the freed serfs. The great principle had been won—or so it appeared—and as the news seeped through that immense country, where even rumour travelled slowly, there was rejoicing. After the long night comes the dawn.

But it became clear at once that there were fundamental differences between the official point of view and the peasants'. They, as has been said here several times, had no conception of ownership in land as land. The land belonged to the man who tilled it. If he failed to utilize it he ceased to have any right to it. The Government's view—and that of the land owners themselves—did not coincide with this traditional Russian interpretation. To them land was land, a form of property that could be bought and sold and allowed to run wild or be cultivated at the will of the man who had paid good money for it. Hence, if land was to be transferred from the land owners to the peasants there must be compensation. Obviously that compensation had to come from the peasants themselves.

To Western minds—and the minds of the Russian upper classes

had become progressively Westernized—this has the fair face of equity. To the Russian peasant it was sheer, flagrant injustice. The Tsar was making to each peasant a gift of land. That was good and proper. With the same breath as he made his words of gift he asked for payment. It was double dealing of the worst kind. And for long the idea persisted that the whole state of affairs had been misrepresented. The legend of the Tsar as the Father of his People, the Great Leveller unaffected by the claims of this faction or that, made it inconceivable to the peasants that he could have approved such a scurvy act. It was surely, they thought, that he was surrounded by false counsellors, who gave him a wrong impression of what things were. If he did but know the truth he would set things to rights at once.

Alexander had the will to reform, if not the natural inclination. But he had not the personality nor the ruthlessness needed by a reformer if success is to be won. His emancipation, after the first amazement at its boldness had vanished, pleased no one. The peasants were left with a sense of burning injustice, as though they had been cheated in the very moment of fulfilment. The land owners considered that they had been badly betrayed and their loyalty to the throne that had so long upheld the interests of their class suffered a severe shock. There were riots that were not quelled without the use of arms. And as the scheme unfolded under practical conditions the disappointment and disillusion grew.

It soon became the view of the peasants that they had been doubly cheated. Not only had they to pay for the land they were allotted but that land was in itself insufficient. And the method of its distribution was not exactly happy—a point that still further incensed the class that had built all its hopes on release from bondage. The term 'cat's plot' became commonplace. A too literal interpretation was given to the phrase 'equal division'. Peasants allotted so much land found that their holding was not all in one piece. The total made over to a community was carved up in strictly equal parts. Thus the individual peasant might receive a piece of arable land near his hut while his pasture was some distance away; and he would find his quota of the total completed by a patch of useless scrub on the boundaries. Moreover no allowance had been made for the variation of soil. The peasant found himself still bound, if only for the reason that he still had to labour for the local land owner in order to obtain the wherewithal to rent that little extra piece of land which would enable him to grow a complete crop.

The details of this problem are too varied and intricate to go into deeply here. Moreover the subject has been discussed in books and



pamphlets covering very many years. All sorts of problems were locked up with the main one, and each year seemed to bring forth some new point of contention, some new anomaly, to which either land owner or peasant took exception.

The status of the peasant under the emancipation was peculiar. He was in effect neither free nor bond. If he was no longer the land owner's he was still not yet a fully fledged citizen enjoying complete civil rights. The burdens remained in taxation, in repayment dues, and the like. And new authorities multiplied to harass and batten on the peasant. It is perhaps not surprising that a revulsion of feeling set in, and that it was possible some few years ago to find old men who, having known serfdom, regretted its passing. Perhaps they thought it was better to be the slave of one master than the whipping-boy of everyone who was dressed in a little brief authority.

The position of the peasants under the new dispensation steadily became worse. Their land was inadequate for their needs, and no matter what happened to themselves the demands of the taxpayer were inexorable. Eventually it came to the point when many of the mouzhiks were forced to sell their produce at the time of lowest prices—the harvest—in order to satisfy the demands of the State and later to buy back what they could during the high-price period later in the year. Debt increased. The peasant became the victim of the usurer who advanced him at exorbitant interest the money to meet his dues.

It is a melancholy tale in all its sordid detail. For this was also a period of exploitation and commercial expansion. Land was acquired for railways, roads, and factories, often at the expense of the peasants. The peasants themselves were often forced off the land and driven into the towns to become proletarians with no anchor and no loyalty to anything.

Moreover agriculture rapidly declined, even faster than it had been doing under serfdom. Driven to extremes the peasants were consuming the seed corn and overtaxing the land with which they had been provided. Surpluses declined and the towns were able to exist only by buying the crops that the peasants had themselves grown for their own livelihood.

It was during this period that a word, evil enough in its connotations at the time and later to have attached to it a specially sinister meaning, came into general use. That word was *kulak*—the fist. At the time it implied a usurer, a man willing to make loans at huge interest to enable the peasant to pay his way. The interest was taken out in labour on the kulak's own farm. It was in this way that



flourishing commercial farmings arose. Through this agency the peasants found themselves once more compelled to give so much free labour to another every year—and that other could command it when he pleased.

Just how heavy the burdens were on the peasant may be judged by the statement of an Imperial Commission in 1871, ten years after the emancipation, that over the whole peasantry as much as 92·7 per cent of all their produce was yielded to the State in sundry forms of taxation and dues. The figure is appalling. In three figures it sums up the whole reason for the failure of the emancipation. The peasant exchanged one form of bondage for another. He was back where he started—or perhaps a little further back.

It has been contended that the grant of a larger piece of land to each peasant would have saved the situation. On paper this is no doubt a sound conclusion. In practice one may doubt whether it would have worked. For there was something radically amiss in the Russian machine. It was not merely the details of emancipation that were wrong, a matter of acres here or half-acres there. Over-topping all was the position of the cumbrous bureaucratic state, asking and demanding the whole time.

From 1861 till the time of the Bolsheviks' revolution the position of the peasant went from bad to worse. The original scheme was tinkered with again and again. But adjustments could not save it. The price paid for a nominal freedom was too high. At one stride Russia had leapt from medieval serfdom to an uncontrolled capitalist economy without the intermediate periods of growth that did something in other countries to mitigate the pains of commercial expansion.

Let it be admitted that the emancipation scheme was bad because it was a compromise. Let it further be admitted that it created anomalies, that it favoured one class at the expense of another, that its working was hampered by dishonest officials and biased judges. Even all that does not fully explain the complete and utter failure that followed a reform to which the great mass of the people had looked forward for generations.

There was something deeper, a more fundamental cause. There was something rotten in the state of Russia. Time, the inescapable, had flown on, and Russia was hardly aware of the fact. She was building railways—vast projects like the Trans-Siberian. She was establishing industries on the Western European scale. Yet her system of government was medieval. It conformed to the pattern drawn by Peter the Great. It was presided over by an hereditary monarch whose outlook, basically, was the same as that of the Grand Princes

## THE RUSSIANS

of Moscow. It is probable that the most perfectly planned legislation would have produced results little, if any, better.

The time was ripe for a new Raskol—a new defiance of authority, a new orientation to the needs of the times. It was not to be long delayed.

## SEEDS OF DEMOCRACY

How big a thing was involved in the emancipation became fully clear only after the lapse of years. Idealists, particularly those Slavophiles who had instituted the practice of 'going to the people' as a sort of religious rite, and who saw in the peasant everything that was noble in humanity—patience, long-suffering, humility, courage, and faith—believed that once the mouzhik was set free Russia would at once become a land of general freedom and happiness. Nothing of the sort happened. Emancipation had become a fetish. It was a magic word that solved everything of itself—according to the dreamers. As we have seen, the reality of emancipation meant suffering and hardship, problems and disillusion, the barter of a servile security for an insecure nominal freedom.

The emancipation was in fact the signal for frenzied reform. And it was in the course of these reforms that democracy was given its first limited chance in modern Russia. There had been national assemblies in the past but they had been called only for special occasions and even then had rarely been fully representative even of the upper classes. Now with the freeing of the serfs new forms of local government came into being, and with their creation the seeds of democracy were sown.

It was the emancipation of the serfs that brought into prominence the village Mir or commune. It was an ancient feature of village life in Russia and has its counterparts in almost every primitive society. The Mir was, in effect, a council of the village householders, all of whom participated in its deliberations equally. They met to decide questions of importance to the village as a whole. It was this commune which fixed the dates for sowing and reaping, for fixing the rota for the use of communal village property, for allocating land and adjusting boundaries.

In the spate of sentimental literature glorifying the Russian peasant, which was one of the most astonishing features of Russian literature during the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Mir has been much misrepresented. It has been held up as a model of independence, as a growth peculiar to Russia. And in the eyes of the Slavophiles it assumed an importance that it never, in actual fact,

attained. But for all that it was the bedrock of peasant government, and it has played a vital part in the development of Russian village life.

The curious thing about the Mir is that it was and continued to be a virtually autonomous body. There was no aspect of village life, no problem, whether domestic or communal, that it did not consider itself competent to discuss, and by sheer common sense and the exercise of native intelligence it reached surprisingly just and equitable decisions. From hereditary puzzles to rights of pasture, from marriage problems to defining boundaries, the Mir entered into every phase of village activity. And it did its work quite independently of the established law of the land.

The Mir did not hesitate to grant divorces, for example, when it thought the occasion proper and had regard for neither the canon law nor the civil law of the Russian state in arriving at its decision. One of its most onerous burdens was the collection of taxes. The village was taxed as a unit, and it was left to the Mir to decide how this liability should be distributed among the households of the village. It was a difficult enough task, yet on the whole its decisions and allocations were just. The members of the Mir knew in detail the affairs of every family in the village and they did not consider, as would a central authority, merely objective or statistical data in determining the amount each peasant should pay individually. It did not follow, for example, that because one peasant owned two cows and a horse and had a family of three, he would pay exactly the same tax as another with the same property and the same number of dependants. The Mir took into account that the crops of the one had failed last year or that the other had had an ailing wife and daughter to look after—and adjusted the tax accordingly. There was a crude communism in its activities along the line of ‘from each according to his ability’.

And it was the common-sense nature of the decisions, not bound up in legal phraseology and informed all the time by deep local knowledge, that gave the Mir its authority among the peasants. The Mir was their own tribunal. It was a buffer between them and the State. They were content to leave matters to it and to abide by its decisions. Those who contend that the spark of democracy has never lived in the Russian spirit might well study the interesting records of proceedings of various Mirs published by Slavophiles during the nineteenth century.

For it is a fact that, quite apart from the shining example of Novgorod, democracy of a crude kind has always existed side by side with oppressive autocracy in Russia. And the way of its development has

been peculiar, especially by Western standards, where the line of progress has been diametrically opposite. In England, for example, democracy began at the top and gradually seeped downwards till the stage of universal suffrage arrived. In Parliament itself real power devolved slowly from the House of Lords to the House of Commons. But in Russia the reverse process has been at work. Democracy began very much at the bottom, with these same *Mirs*, in which a relic of the old tribal conference round the fire might clearly be seen. It was among the peasants that the right of free judgement and free discussion were most appreciated.

And so, it will be remembered, was it with the *Raskol*. When the principle of religious freedom was forced it was the peasants who eagerly exploited it. The upper classes clung tenaciously to the old rites and the old order, of which autocracy was an integral part. When Peter the Great humiliated the Church they did not protest.

As a result of the emancipation a much greater responsibility fell on the *Mirs*. In the first place they were responsible for the allocation of land. It was not a job that could be done once for all. Each commune had so much land given it to be distributed according to the number of 'souls' it had to feed. The *Mir* had to apportion that land according not only to the number of 'souls' but also to its productivity to ensure complete fairness. It would not have been equitable, in the peasants' view, to give one man rich ground and another poor. It was this desire for fairness that led to the split holdings and the cast-iron distribution which has already been noticed in the last chapter.

The *Mir* was a symbol of the prosperity of the village. It was not merely a journalistic desire for a striking name that caused the peasants to christen the kulaks—the usurers—'Mir-eaters'. In that they indicated their opinion of the social value of the kulak. He was antisocial, a parasite, and the result of his activities was a steady decline in the authority of the *Mir*. For there was now a financial power in the village. Money, for the first time in Russian peasant life, was beginning to talk; and it was using the usual language of dictation.

It was only after the emancipation that the Slavophiles and the annotators of village life discovered the *Mir* and brought it into prominence. And even then they were writing rather of the *Mir* as it had been than of the contemporary *Mir*. For with freedom for the peasants the *Mir* became a more formal official body. It was charged with definite responsibilities to the State instead of merely discharging rather ill-defined duties, which were ignored unless they conflicted with more general interests. To the collection of elders elected by the villagers themselves was added an official recorder.

He was often a man brought in from outside, for literacy was still a rarity among the peasants. And stage by stage he became something of a dictator in much the same way as a club secretary can take charge of the management committee. He was free of practically all supervision, for there was none among the Mir members who could dispute his records—and it was the records by which higher authority reached decisions when decisions had to be made.

Here was opened up a way of blackmail that was not ignored by the minor officials who found themselves recorders to the village Mirs. But worse was to follow. The kulaks began to use their hold over the peasants to secure election to the Mir. Thus they still further strengthened their grip on the village. At the beginning the peasant, driven to desperation by the extortionate demands of the usurers, would finally appeal to the Mir, and the Mir, while not taking sides, would promulgate a decision that sometimes meant the difference between continued existence and ruin to the peasant concerned. But with the advent of the kulaks and their nominees to the Mir, this last safeguard went. More and more the Mir became a packed body. The kulaks were at once judges and defendants in their own causes, and it was not often that the plaintiff secured a verdict.

This is one of the paradoxes of the emancipation. In the days of serfdom the Mir was a free body, exercising in its way a very great authority and left much to itself by a central or provincial government that could not be troubled with local domestic affairs. As soon as serfdom went and freedom came theoretically to the people of the village, the freedom of the Mir itself began to decline. It was one more indication of a body politic in decay. The natural process of growth was being arrested. In its place was growing a huge cancer that multiplied its evil cells spontaneously.

The Zemstvos, corresponding roughly to the English county council, though formed some years in advance of the latter, were created in 1864 in order to direct the affairs of districts of a certain size. The proposal was first advanced in 1859, and the original laws drafted to set up the councils went much further along the road to self-government than the act of 1864 which actually brought them into being. Already by that year the old influences had begun to reassert their power and several of the original intentions had to be hurriedly modified.

It had originally been planned to elect the Zemstvos on a fully representative basis, with no differentiation between the various classes of voter. When it became known that representatives of the freed serfs, directly elected and in equal numbers, were to sit and deliberate side by side with those who had recently been their

## SEEDS OF DEMOCRACY

owners, there was an outcry by the land owners. The very idea was preposterous. The Zemstvos had already become a pawn in the game of the land owners, who saw in these new councils a means of re-establishing that control over the affairs of the district which the emancipation seemed to take from them.

Accordingly, the electoral scheme was based on property qualification. The peasants still returned members to the council but the election was indirect. The Mir first chose a body of electors who in turn united with other electors in the district and elected a certain number of representatives to the council itself. The method was clumsy, but it was worked with such skill by the peasants that it resulted in the choice of an astonishingly able series of representatives. The one choice was by merit. In the atmosphere of the electoral college, where several villages might be represented, the claims of personality and local standing counted for little. To those indirectly elected members were added indirect representatives of those whose landed property exceeded a certain acreage and of those who carried on trade or owned businesses or property within the boundaries of towns in the district. The upshot was a preponderance of landed representation, for the total number of final councillors was determined by acreage; and a peasant commune had to have twice the area of a private owner to return the same number of members.

These councils did strikingly good work in various fields, notably in education and in the encouragement of peasant arts and industries. Their success is, indeed, one of the more satisfying features of a period otherwise distinguished by reaction, turmoil, discontent, and the rumblings of distant revolution. That the councils did not do more in other directions was due to their somewhat anomalous position. Formed as bodies for local self-government, they were yet denied many of the powers that should have been vested in them. These were left, as they had always been, in the hands of the local officials. And these same local officials had a considerable latitude allowed them for interference in decisions of the council.

It was the same familiar story. The central government, the bureaucracy, gave with one hand and took away with the other. It went so far and then its courage failed. It was jealous for its own powers and did not propose to delegate more than it need.

None the less the Zemstvos were a remarkable step forward in providing what Russia had never possessed before—an organized system for the expression of the people's will and opinions. The marvel is not that their power was circumscribed and that the officials retained the right of the last word but that so much authority was in fact allowed to rest with the councils. They might have been



## THE RUSSIANS

made purely advisory bodies, whose recommendations might or might not be noticed by the bureaucracy. As it was they were granted a considerable amount of real freedom, and in education, health, and welfare work did much to bring Russia into line and even in some instances advance of the rest of the world.

The originators of the Zemstvos can hardly have had any conception of the vital role they were to play in the history of Russia. These councils, unambitious in their scope, with no executive authority, at the mercy of the petty local official and the higher bureaucracy alike, containing with them two opposed sets of people who saw their interests as diametrically opposed—these councils were a far greater revolution, a far more searching reform than the emancipation of the serfs. The freeing of the serfs was important—vitality so. But it was only redressing a wrong done in the past, a belated repayment of a debt of history. The Zemstvos were something entirely new. Alexander II deserves far more to be remembered for them than for his well-inspired but badly executed coup for popular support in emancipating the serfs.

It was well for the councils that the country seethed and boiled on the fire of the emancipation laws. The attention of critics and opponents, even of the Government itself, was turned elsewhere. Thus it was that they were able to begin their work and find their feet in comparative obscurity. They were neither pestered by officials nor subjected to the limelight of well-intentioned liberals. They escaped the fate of being 'adopted' by any political party or group and thus earning support or opposition that had nothing to do with their work.

Just how big a revolution had been wrought was not apparent until they had firmly established themselves in the popular favour. The Zemstvo was doing the impossible—or what had hitherto been thought of as impossible. Democracy was in action in Russia. A few keen political observers saw the significance of the fact, but even so the general public, still wrangling over the details of emancipation, did not grasp the fact that at last the seed of democracy was growing into a sturdy plant.

Here on these councils the two irreconcilables, the members of the two nations that Peter had created, were working together for a common cause; and that cause was the welfare of the people as a whole. The land owners who, at first, had recoiled in horror from the mere idea of serving on the same council as former serfs, now found in those very serfs men whose native intelligence was the perfect counterpoint and support to their own wider culture and experience. If the land owner had by tradition and education a

greater knack for the niceties of administration, the peasant delegate brought with him an exhaustive and intimate knowledge of local conditions and local needs.

Here too, on these councils, a bridge was being built. The two classes were beginning to see that ultimately their interests were the same, that both owed allegiance to Russia and that the prosperity of Russia depended on the cultivation and good working of the land. Problems were solved not on the lines of party interest or factional dogma but on their merits. Peasant might back the landlord against fellow peasant, landlord ally himself with peasant to defeat his own neighbour.

From the Zemstvos sprang the idea of a Russian Parliament and a Russian Constitution. It was not that these ideas were new in themselves. Idealists had fought for them for a long time. But it was the work of the councils that proved these ideals not impracticable. It seemed as though the Russian could work democracy as successfully as nations that for centuries had patiently and painfully learnt its practice.

Russian autocracy seems to have suffered from the Freudian death-wish—the urge to self-destruction. It has time and again been blind to those things which might have saved it and grasped wildly at the very things that eventually brought it down. It had the never-failing weakness of all absolute power—a blind trust in its own judgement, a faith intensified by the grafted-on belief of the divine right of the Tsar himself.

If the Tsars had realized the full implications of the Zemstvos' success they would have utilized it to the fullest possible extent in safeguarding the future of both Russia and themselves. It is possible that by a gradual extension of the powers of the Zemstvos to the more executive sides of government much good could have been done, and that even some of the worse muddles following emancipation might have been cleared up. In that way the confidence of the people could have been won and the dead hand of bureaucracy lifted from local affairs. With local administration on a firm and popular basis the time would have been ripe for an experiment on a wider scale—an experiment that, because of the knowledge gained by the Zemstvos and the trust reposed in them, would have been almost sure of success: the establishment of central parliamentary government.

In fact the work of the Zemstvos was drawn upon when the step of forming the Duma was taken, but the Duma did not spring naturally out of the council experience. Rather was it created and the strength of the Zemstvos enlisted in its aid afterwards. The distinc-

tion may seem fine, but it is a great and important one. Its effects will be noted later.

Liberal opinion grew stronger and stronger in Russia. Democracy was seen not merely as an ideal to be worked for but also as a practicable form of government for Russia. Petitions for a constitution began to shower on the Tsar. Russia was making up the leeway of the centuries.

Once again a Russian failing destroyed the high hopes of the day. Encouraged by the growing strength of liberal views and radical opinions, the active revolutionaries got busy. They raised several minor riots. They initiated a campaign of incendiarism and assassination. The value of the golden mean, of the gradualness of evolution, had never been plain to the Russian mind. An unwise attempt to force the pace was made. The greatest blunder made by these extremists was in coming to terms with the Poles. The plot was discovered and brought to the notice of the Tsar.

Action and reaction, says Newton's third law of motion, are equal and opposite. The immediate effect of these manœuvres was to cause the whole of the progressive movement to come under the suspicion of the bureaucracy and the Tsar himself. Inevitably authority, still jealous of its absolute power, began to ask itself: 'Are we going too far and giving too much?' The bureaucrats, who had the ear of the Tsar, saw that their own existence was in jeopardy and did not hesitate to play upon the doubts in the Emperor's mind.

The Tsar refused a plea for the calling of a national assembly. He denied that without it he could not listen to the voice of the people, and almost immediately there came an almost complete reversal of policy. It was the old story of the Romanovs—first the enlightened period, then the retreat into reaction. Education, law, freedom of the Press—one by one the various fields in which Alexander's reforming zeal had been busy felt the force of the slowly changing policy. So far from stopping the trend of revolutionary thought, the reaction was an opportunity for the extremists. They pointed to it as an example of the insufficiency of piecemeal reform and their activities of terrorism steadily increased. In 1881 they gained their end—a senseless one in itself—the assassination of the Tsar himself. He was fatally injured by a bomb thrown at him as he drove along the streets of Petersburg.

This was a foolish move. It merely ensured the triumph of reaction and the establishment of bureaucracy more firmly than ever before. Alexander was not a great reformer, but he was a pains-taking one and, above all, he possessed a gift rare in the Romanovs—realism. If he seemed to retreat from his early progressive position

## SEEDS OF DEMOCRACY

it was due in no small measure to the fact that the revolutionaries themselves tried to hasten too much. They did not realize that here was a sincere ruler anxious to discharge his traditional duty as leveller and restore some sort of balance to his people; and they did not understand the terrific difficulties involved.

It would be absurd to call the reign of Alexander II great. It would be even more absurd to call him a great man. But this much may be said of him: he was a man of his times, alive to their currents, sensitive as few Tsars have been to the unexpressed urgings and trends of public opinion. The good work he undertook may have been inevitable but it might have required another fifty years to produce another Tsar prepared to admit its inevitability. And his murder put an end to what he had begun. The reactionaries could shake their heads and say, 'We told you so'. The road stood wide open for a return to tradition—to rule by personal power. Yet the enemies of the Tsardom were right by their own standards. If they wanted to destroy the whole principle of Tsardom they could have chosen no better victim. For with Alexander II, the Tsar who put Russia's faltering feet on one of the bypaths leading to the main highway of self-government, perished the last hope of the survival of the Romanovs and the Russian throne. His two successors, Alexander III and Nicholas II, did but speak the pathetic epilogue to a drama that reached its climax with Alexander the Emancipator.

## THE GREAT FRUSTRATION

This is not a history of Tsars or dynasties. It is an attempt to sketch out the main landmarks in the long journey of the Russian people towards their own kind of freedom—a freedom in which, at last, the common happiness of the people has become the ruling principle of the land. From the point of view of the historian who crams his pages with dates, this book is full of gaps and grave omissions. Yet a conventional history is, in the main, a record of nonentities who, had they been born otherwise than as heirs or legatees of crowns, would have lived and died unrecorded save in the registers of their parish churches.

There is little that need be said personally of Alexander III or of Nicholas II. The right of the latter to fame is that he was the last of the Romanovs. With him the line that had begun with Michael expired and the long-matured account with the people was settled. He was an inglorious figure with which to close a dynasty that had lasted for three centuries. His was not an heroic figure on which a long-oppressed people could wreak a final revenge. Yet he exhibited, and to a marked degree, the salient faults of the Romanovs and showed not the slightest trace of the brilliant flames that had burned in the ruthless soul of Peter the Great; and he had none of the realism of Alexander II. He was above all that most pathetic of all figures: the weak man playing the autocrat, the unimaginative ruler trying to be a leader inspired by God.

Under Alexander III the pace of the reaction begun at the close of Alexander II's reign accelerated. The censorship of the Press became more absolute. The power of the bureaucracy was increased. The various incipient movements towards a constitution and representative government were strangled and scotched, if not killed. Terrorism increased. There were all the signs of an approaching crisis. Alexander reigned only thirteen years; by his repressive measures and his lack of all political initiative he managed to maintain an uneasy *status quo*. It was left for Nicholas II and his German wife, who perhaps had visions of being another Catherine, to attempt to weather the gale when it came.

Nicholas's early policy was to continue and to intensify where he could the repressive acts of his predecessor. But events were getting

beyond the merely negative treatment of repression. In 1904, when he had been ten years on the throne, the crisis broke. Its immediate cause was the disastrous war with Japan. It was a mere Eastern adventure, this Japanese campaign, inspired by the relatively easy success of Russian arms in acquiring territory in the Far East. Russia's move eastwards was not viewed with pleasure by the rapidly rising power of Japan, which even then saw herself as the overlord of Asia. The Russian advance was challenged. Nicholas and his advisers, superbly confident in their resources, accepted the challenge.

That the war itself was disastrous from a military point of view is a matter of common knowledge. But it is not so widely realized that the greater disaster was the internal collapse of Russian administration. Not till the First European War, ten years later, was similar ineptitude and lack of national organization to be shown by a great power; and then again the culprit was to be Imperial Russia. The blow to national prestige of the military defeats—they might be more accurately described as *débâcles*—and, even more, the glaring evidence of corruption in high places, utter incompetence in administration, and unpreparedness in the armed forces both in materiel and strategy shocked the public. The demand for reform, which Nicholas had done his best to choke back in the mouth of the people, rose to a clamour and could not now be refused.

But a last and desperate attempt was made to suppress it. In 1904 the Union of Liberation was formed. It was a rallying-point throughout the country for all the progressive forces, which now stood united for the first time in their history. Nicholas and his chief minister, Plehve, tried to repress this organization as earlier ones had been repressed. Exiles were freely imposed on leading members of the Union. The *Zemstvos* came in for harsh handling, particularly the *Zemstvo* of Tver, which was showing 'harmful tendencies', as the official phrase ran. The election of certain leaders, notably Shipov, of Moscow, was declared unacceptable. Throughout all the provinces officials of the Union and delegates to the *Zemstvos* were victimized. All this was ill conceived and dangerous from the Government's point of view. First of all it was a public admission of the strength of the popular cause; secondly, it created martyrs. The Government was seriously alarmed—and not so much for Russia as for its own position. With every new arrest, every new exile sent to Siberia, the support accorded to the Government grew less. Plehve was not so much signing the death-warrant of the Union as the abdication of his own powers. Still contending that he and his party represented the popular will, Plehve was killed by a bomb in September 1904. Now the landslide had begun. The last months of 1904 brought the entire



## THE RUSSIANS

progressive movement into the open with challenges to the Government, and in 1905 the organized workers joined in the fray. There was a general strike that spread from Petersburg and Moscow to many centres in the country. It was during a demonstration in January 1905 that the massacre of Bloody Sunday occurred. Of that orderly procession which marched through the streets of Petersburg five hundred were killed and three thousand wounded by the savage attacks of Guards and Cossacks.

This was the eve of revolution. The country as a whole felt that while demonstrations were deplorable, the Government had declared war on the people. And when the Russo-Japanese War, still in progress, reached its final disaster, the Government was discredited beyond all hope of redemption. There was only one thing Nicholas could do if he was to retain his crown and preserve something of his heritage. On the 19th of August 1905 the manifesto calling together the First Imperial Duma was signed.

There were no rejoicings at this news. The scheme when examined was seen to be a mere sop, conceded by a reluctant Tsar in the hope that dangerous public opinion might be mollified. No real power was to be given to the Duma. Its franchise was so limited that it would have become a mere mouthpiece of the Government and the Tsar. Meetings were held and several important groups decided to withhold their support. The general strike spread all over the country, and every phase of public activity ceased, with the single exception of the medical services.

There was a hurried conference of ministers, who decided that a further appeal must be made to the Tsar. At first Nicholas was adamant. He refused further concessions to a cause which he considered had already been too much favoured. It seems that he was more than inclined to prefer the alternative of a military dictatorship and condemn his people to massacres beside which Bloody Sunday would be insignificant. In this he had the support of the Grand Duke Nicholas—that soldier-prince who saw himself always in the role of a great, strong leader. There is a story that the Grand Duke threatened to commit suicide in the Tsar's presence if the latter gave way.

But Nicholas always yielded if sufficient pressure were put upon him. His ministers were now desperate. They urged their case with all the powers of persuasion they could bring to bear, and the result was a revised decree calling together an Imperial Duma. And it was to be a real Duma, based on an almost universal franchise and endowed with all legislative powers. The popular cause now stood on the brink of triumph. The news of the fresh edict was greeted



## THE GREAT FRUSTRATION

with national rejoicing, and the people even found themselves prepared to look more kindly on the Government which had thwarted their desires for so long. The general strike was called off and something like normal life was resumed. Only one unappeasable remained: the first Soviet to function in Russia. It tried to continue the strike, but public backing was now gone, and this last forlorn hope of pushing still further the claims of the extremists was finally abandoned.

This first Duma was probably the most promising assembly that Russia had ever known—or was to know until two decades later. There was hardly a leader of national affairs who did not belong to it. All seemed set fair for an era of peace and progress in the Russian Land.

These high hopes were doomed to disappointment. Witte, now acting as the Tsar's chief adviser, was intriguing behind the Duma's back. He was seeking by all means available to him to take away as much as possible of the concessions made by the Tsar in convening this Duma, and he was seeking also to make the Government independent of the financial control of the new parliament by obtaining a secret loan from France.

There were, too, more open attempts to drive the Duma into impotency. The Government, facing for the first time an elected assembly, showed no signs of readiness to adapt itself to the new conditions. It was not long before the Government on the one hand and the Duma leaders on the other were at loggerheads. The sharp cleavage between administration and legislature was all the more marked in that, despite its varied constitution, the Duma was practically unanimous in its insistence on reform and on the shape that reform should take. Affairs reached a deadlock from which there seemed no escape. Neither side would deviate from the position it had taken up.

It is reported that Nicholas had advanced so far to the belief that nothing but concession could save him that he seriously considered dismissing his Government and calling on the progressive leaders to take their place. But the course was repulsive to him. He was bound by the tradition of the Court—and that tradition did not include the summoning of comparative strangers—and men of abhorred views at that—to the Tsar's private council chamber. For some little time he vacillated, as was his habit. Then, characteristically, he summoned up his reserves and decided on the old course. He backed the Government against the people. The Duma was dissolved. Yet for all that he made one astute move, appointing as his prime minister Peter Stolypin, who had gained some sort of reputation in the first Duma

and before that as a fearless and able Governor of Saratov. There is clear evidence that personally Stolypin was distasteful to him. When some five years later Stolypin was assassinated in the Tsar's presence at Kiev on a gala opera night, Nicholas looked on unmoved. He was learning slowly to reconcile himself to being advised by men who were not his friends.

The second Duma had a more decided aspect in some ways. Stolypin had promised reform but not revolution. He had even announced himself as a constitutionalist but not a parliamentarian. The peasants' reply was to elect representatives of rather more advanced revolutionary views to the second Duma. They were men of courage and proved worth. Stolypin could not hope to win them over by fair words and fine promises. Yet if it was more extreme, this second Duma had less real ability. Many of the leaders of the reform movement did not return.

Foiled in their attempt to force the election of a Duma favourable to their wishes, the Tsar and his ministers this time fell back on a device that had become almost a routine in Russian administration. The secret police found 'evidence' of a widespread revolutionary plot centred on the Duma. There is no doubt that the whole thing was a carefully conceived and elaborate fake, but it served its turn. The second Duma was dissolved and its members sent about their business—many of them to the prisons or to exile, which as members of the Duma they had escaped before.

This return to the policy of repression did not end with the dissolution. There were violent police measures all over the country. Most of the leaders of the progressive groups found themselves in trouble of one kind or another. The occasion was taken too of altering the whole law relating to the franchise. In the plans for the Third Duma the peasantry were virtually ignored. Once again the semblance of popular representation was forced on the land-holding class, now in decline everywhere. The third Duma, when it assembled in 1907, was only a shadow of the former two, with little claim to be an elected organ of the people.

The whole episode bore the appearance of a shrug of the shoulders by paternal government. The Tsar clearly wished to indicate that he had, against his better judgement, listened to the pleadings of his unwise children and granted them their request. They had responded, out of their inexperience and unruliness, in taking measures which threatened the security of the whole country. They must allow him, their Father, to know best and guide them in their choice of representatives. In him reposed the divine right of ruling the peoples of all the Russias. It was near to blasphemy to think otherwise.

## THE GREAT FRUSTRATION

In its way this third Duma contributed some modest additions to the reform of the country, but it is wrong to claim, as some liberal partisans have, that it was unexpectedly good. It had little power. There was an easy device open to the Government which the Duma was powerless to oppose. Certain items could be placed before the Duma simply as an imperial gesture. Decision on them was reserved to the Tsar. In this way the Duma was denied any effective control over finance; and with that every semblance of even a restraining influence on the Tsar's power. The third Duma, whatever its achievements may have been in unimportant ways, was a sorry farce. It is difficult to credit that Russian history would have been any different had it never sat. It was solely and simply a device for keeping the popular voice quiet and the popular conscience asleep. Not one of its acts had any effect on the main trend of Russian policy, either external or internal. It was a lightly loaded safety-valve that prevented, by a sham of power, the forces of revolution from getting too much support. The fourth Duma, elected in 1912, was the last of its kind. It was summarily dismissed on the outbreak of war, though not dissolved. And it tended more and more during its short active life to become a merely deliberative assembly debating issues on which the Tsar and his ministers had already reached decisions, whether known or secret.

There have been attempts to represent this period, from 1905 to the outbreak of war in 1914, as a period of nascent liberalism in Russia and to advance from that view to the belief that but for the war and its dénouement in the Revolution, Russia would have progressed smoothly and easily into full representative government. There is little solid ground for this belief. Nothing in the histories of the four Dumas shows any sign of evolutionary progress. On the contrary, each successive assembly represented a retrogression from its predecessor. The Dumas became increasingly props for a decaying system of government. They showed yet again the Russian tradition of jumping at a thing and then slowly retreating from it in the moment of capture.

That the first and second Dumas, though in progressively less degree, had the makings of live national legislatures, is unquestionable. That the third, and still less the fourth, had any claims to be considered even representative may be doubted. If they imposed checks on certain abuses, such as patronage, they were checks that an agitated public opinion would have made in any event. The truth is that the history of parliamentary 'government' in Russia was not only short-lived but relatively insignificant. If it proved anything it was that in the blighting air of Tsardom no institution that de-

pended for its life on freedom of expression and action could hope to last.

There is one curious sidelight on the personality of Nicholas II that this period gives. Like all weak men, the Tsar was unwilling to come to a decision, and when he had made one he was doubtful of its rightness, particularly when it conflicted with irrational bias. He believed in the divine right of his office. He hated parliaments of every kind. And he yielded what he did only under pressure. He did not scruple to use any and every means of ensuring that the concessions he had made should be nullified. None the less he was in doubt the whole time. He could not convince himself that it was right entirely to ignore the voice of the people. And he sought to listen to it in ways more in keeping with his tastes and his temperament.

It is this which explains to some extent the power exercised over him and his wife by the monk Rasputin, who has become a highly coloured legend. Rasputin's power in the first place was based on his undoubted powers of faith-healing, which enabled him to benefit the ailing Tsarevitch, that ill-starred heir to a throne already toppling. But this was only the first step to imperial favour. Rasputin, as a wandering holy man, a son of poverty-stricken parents, a member of one of the secret sects, claimed to speak with the voice of the people. It was this claim which made him appear valuable as an addition to deliberations on state affairs. Rasputin has been much misunderstood. He has had crimes attributed to him of which he was innocent. He did much harm. Sometimes he did some good. But he is best seen as one of the exotic flowers of a rapidly decaying culture. In him was symbolized all the old mysticism and mystery of Holy Russia, a Russia that was the product and servant of the Tsardom. He was of his time. If there had been no Rasputin there would have been someone else to bolster up the Tsar's declining faith in himself. Indeed there were many other strange mystic advisers round the court of the last of the Romanovs. Rasputin was a necessity to Nicholas II, and his sins and his failings are as much that monarch's as his own. The weak man always likes to be reassured. He likes to pride himself on sources of private knowledge and certainty. If he is a plain man he turns to the astrologer and the fortune-teller, and believes in luck and omens. If he is a Tsar he turns to a Rasputin.

## Chapter 20

# RED MORNING

Russia, spanning two continents, may be likened to a great flywheel that will spin for a long time by its own momentum, but every so often requires an impulse from without to keep it moving. Throughout the ages it is influences from outside that have given the new impetus to history and set the wheel going at increasing speed. And it is remarkable that during the periods when the wheel works by its own inertia Russia tends to look to the East. The new impulse comes always from the West. So it was with the Varangians. So it was with Peter the Great. So it was with Catherine, who was herself the daughter of a Western land.

From the middle of the nineteenth century these impulses from the West had become more frequent, and the wheel was beginning to spin faster and faster. It was the Russo-Japanese War that gave one of the final thrusts—and this paradoxically enough came from the West by a roundabout route. For the defeat of Russia was due to the fact that Japan had Westernized herself and was fighting Russia with methods and weapons too new and strong for her. The First European War applied the last and most decisive addition to the already great store of energy. The wheel was going too fast. At any moment it threatened to break apart from its own internal stress. In 1917 the disintegration came. The October Revolution scattered the fragments of the old Russia to the four winds. There is something significant in the fact that almost from the first the Bolsheviks began to collect together the broken pieces and tried to utilize them in the building of a new and stronger wheel.

It is possible to-day to take a more objective view of the October Revolution. One need no longer write entirely from a purely pro or anti viewpoint. There is in fact little need to write at length on the Revolution. The tale in books on Soviet Russia grows ever longer and it must surely be that by now all the facts have been placed before the world.

Here then it is unnecessary to deal either with the events that led up to the Revolution or with development since. A brief survey would be misleading, and a proper analysis would take too much space and divert attention from the main aim, which is to present

a picture of the Russian people as distinct from their rulers, of the long wearisome struggle from slavery through serfdom to freedom. For it is implicit in all that has been written here that under the Soviet Union the people of Russia have attained to a greater measure of freedom—their own kind of freedom—than they have ever attained before.

The war had proceeded from disaster to disaster when the Keren-sky Revolution changed the face of Russia. But it was not the defeats in the field that were the primary cause of the upheaval. Once again, as in the Russo-Japanese war, home affairs became a scandal that not even the least observant could pretend to ignore. The people were the victims of profiteering and exploitation. The war was being used as an excuse for private persons and officials to line their pockets richly. Those who had assumed power and denied the right of the people to have any say in the conduct of a war that was devastating the young manhood of the country showed almost daily a fresh descent into the depths of incompetence and impotence. The few victories won in the field were thrown away by rashness. The country was in a turmoil. And it was into this turmoil that the latest influence from the West came.

For Bolshevism was essentially a Western creed. The Bolsheviks in their first phases were the most violent and determined Westernizers that have ever laid hands on Russia. Their main doctrine sprang from the writings of Marx, a German philosopher who spent the greater part of his productive period in England. He was interpreted and assisted by Engels, a German who had settled in England. Two influences therefore contributed to the foundation of Marxism. One was the German tendency to reduce everything to a philosophic system. The other was the freedom of expression that sprang from an English environment.

But Marx was only the starting-point. The real engineer of modern Bolshevism was Lenin. And Lenin, Russian by birth and origin, was early transplanted to Western soil. From Germany, from Switzerland, from England, he worked day and night for the cause he held close to his heart. He was a man of utter determination, a man the Russian secret police could not break. To him Bolshevism was a creed rather than a political system. And while he rationalized his thinking into a coherent system of philosophical and practical revolutionary writings, he was none the less suffused by that indomitable spate of spiritual fervour which is typically Russian—the spiritual fervour that showed itself in the ‘lockings-up’ of the early Raskolniki and, years after Lenin’s death, among the defenders of unconquered Stalingrad.



With his allies within Russia he built up a complete revolutionary organization from outside the country and there is nothing that shows more completely the organizing genius of the man. He overcame difficulties that would have deterred almost anyone else.

Bolshevism was, then, a new Western gale loosed on Russia. It was a different wind from that which Peter let in through his new windows. For whereas Peter brought from the West material things—guns and ships and tools—Lenin thrust a new philosophy on the Russian people. Yet one not entirely new. Dialectical materialism may have been originally forged by a German in England. Before it reached Russia it had been refined and remoulded in the fire of an intensely Russian spirit. There are features of it as old as Russia itself. Once again it synthesizes the two main Russian traditions of Kiev and Novgorod. Once again it insists on the reality of freedom within a framework of authority. It is not Western in that it does not reflect the typically Western attitude towards democracy. But it is none the less based on the will of the people.

The October Revolution, the Ten Days that Shook the World, was not consummated in any brief period. It aimed at the creation of a new social order, an order in which the rights of the citizen had first place. And such a change takes time. Bolshevism before it was established had to sweep away the remnants of both an old régime and an interim liberalism that seemed to think a mere change of government could reform all Russia's wrongs. It had to purge itself in the fire of civil war and foreign intervention. It had to face and survive an economic and moral boycott from the whole of the Western world. But its impact on the mass of Russia was tremendous. The force of Lenin's personality alone was something that Russia had not known for nearly three hundred years.

Like most young giants, Bolshevism mistook its strength in its youth. It had the cocksureness and the certainty of being right that are the prerogatives of the growing adult—and it earned the suspicion of the elders of the family of nations, as most precocious young men earn the suspicion of their own elders. The early Bolsheviks believed in the imminence of world revolution. They held it their duty to foster that revolution.

And here one comes across one of the most characteristically Russian features of this first Bolshevik creed. The capital had returned to Moscow. The glories of Petersburg became dimmed in the relatively unimportant town of Leningrad. With this return Moscow unconsciously assumed once more its role of world centre of faith. The Third Rome spoke again, but in a new voice and in new phrases. It had once proclaimed the unity of the Church and the



purity of the faith in Russia. Now it spoke of the unity of mankind and the purity of the new order that was being born in the long shadows of the Kremlin. The Russian conception of the people as Messiahs dies hard.

As Bolshevism grew it turned again and again to the West for inspiration. Just as Peter had, the new rulers imported experts from the progressive countries of the Western world. Engineers came from America and England and Germany. Chemists, teachers, doctors, physicists talked the languages of every country but Russia in the universities, the technical colleges, and the schools. From each one of these the vast reservoir of Russia stored a new quantum of energy. The time was approaching rapidly when the need for fresh impulses would be past, and Russia would be able once again to live on her own resources.

In periods of new ideas Russia looks to the West. When she feels sure of herself she withdraws from the West and looks to the East, though still keeping a wary eye on the West. That is a truth worth repeating yet again. It has proved true of the progress of the Bolshevik revolution. That it is so is one more evidence of the essential fitness of the modern creed for the Russian way of life.

With Stalin came again the solid national influence. Lenin had been the meteor from the West. Stalin returned to the tradition of the old rulers and sought to build with the new resources that Lenin had made available—not least the inestimable resource of a new frame of mind, a new psychology—a self-contained Russia strong in her own right and owing little to the world at large.

One turns to Russian history for an understanding of the policy of Joseph Stalin—a policy that has often seemed contradictory and inexplicable to nations who do not know the Russian attitude. His work has many similarities with those of the Muscovite Grand Princes. He has been called by Russians a new Ivan Kalita. For he has been studiously frugal of Russian possessions and wealth, building them up slowly and conservatively like a good estate manager. He has been ruthless when it has been necessary to be ruthless. And he has sought to restore Russia's position not as a world centre of revolution but as a country with its own distinctive pattern of living, its own national pride, its own strength that derives entirely from the Russian people.

Only now, when the magnificent Red armies have shattered the legend of German invincibility, is that carefully modulated policy beginning to be understood. The apparent inconsistencies are slipping into their true perspective. The line of Russian progress is more clearly marked out.

Stalin has looked east in the true Russian manner. He has constructed a new land of promise in Siberia and beyond the Urals. He has given Russia a new and stronger heart. More than all he has given the Russian people—and not only the true Russians, but also the various non-Russian nationalities within the Union—self-confidence, belief in themselves. The last shadows of serfdom and bondage have slipped away in the bright sunlight of a new land.

There is still much that is misunderstood about modern Russia. The Russian outlook is so different from that of the West that there are many obstacles in the way of understanding. Not least is this conception of freedom within authority. Unless those doubts are swept away the full co-operation of Russia with the Western world cannot be ensured.

To what extent, then, is it true to say that the Russian people to-day enjoy freedom?

Superficially it would seem that theirs is not freedom as we understand it. The Russian citizen is supervised in a way that lands like England tolerate only in times of war—and even then reluctantly and under protest. There is no party system in Russia of the kind known in England, or in different forms in the United States and pre-war France. Stalin appears before the eyes of the Western world as a dictator. And with the best will in the world many sincere sympathizers shake their heads when they read of elections at which all the candidates elected to the All-Union Congress are of the same political tinge.

There is a fundamental freedom and a freedom of system. In the West, it is to be feared, the formalities of freedom are perhaps exalted above the actuality. Because a man has a vote he is said to be free. But, as a cynic remarked, it merely means that he is free to starve, free to lose his job, free to stand at the street corner when times are bad. That this is an untrue picture of life in pre-war Britain cannot be denied. Yet it might well seem to be true to a Soviet citizen, whose conception of freedom, built up by the Bolshevik creed, is fundamentally different.

The freedom that the Russian enjoys, and of which he is fully conscious, is the freedom of living. He is free to earn his living as he will. There are no barriers in his way beyond those of his own disabilities. His economy is planned in a way impossible as yet in the West. He pays for that freedom by the sacrifice of certain liberties which through tradition have become dear to the Western mind. If he is supervised, it is for his benefit. Let that be fully grasped: for *his* benefit. For any profit from his labour is returned to him in a dozen different ways.

## THE RUSSIANS

He is free in his own view because he is dependent on no one for his livelihood but his fellow-men. And this is a very real thing in modern Russia. There is a story of a Russian traveller on the Trans-Siberian railway who was pointing out a new town to a foreign visitor as the train swept along. He was enthusiastic in the Russian way, which is rather that of a child with a new toy, a curious delighted possessiveness. When the town had slipped from view he leant back in his seat with an air of complete satisfaction. 'It is good to feel that all that belongs to me and the next man', he said with the light of sincerity in his eyes.

The Russian sees no freedom in endless contention about a wrong way and a right. He is a born arguer. He loves nothing better than talk. But he likes also to have at basis an agreed standard. In the old days it was the Church, the reality of religious experience. To-day it is the truth of his national policy. What surprises the uninformed visitor to Russia is the freedom and pungency of the criticisms of official acts. It arises not from the partisan spirit of a liberal country but from the conviction that failings and shortcomings are a betrayal of the Russian's right to the best—his freedom to live a full and complete life.

And the Russian freedom aims at providing that life. It gives material benefits that none of the Western democracies possess. There is universal education on a scale unattained even in America. There is a medical service co-ordinated and controlled to a national plan. These are all expressions of freedom through unity instead of the Western notion of freedom through diversity.

So with the elections which cause the head-shaking and the doubts. The Russian is agreed that he must have the best. The candidate elected by him is not simply someone put up by the party, but a man who has been carefully selected from among a large number of candidates. Even under more liberal régimes this has been the Russian way, and it has been proved a good one. Throughout Russia to-day the policy of selecting representatives is precisely similar to, but on a larger scale than, that which led to the unexpected and very real success of the liberal Zemstvos. The peasants then were not concerned with factions and party views. Nor is the Soviet citizen of to-day. He wants the best man for the job, and by some instinct he usually finds that one.

Some of the misunderstandings about Russia arise from the old barrier of language. It is easy to translate a word, not so easy to transfer the whole of its associated meanings to an alien tongue—a fact some of our classical scholars are sometimes apt to forget. A living language arises from the psychology of those who use it. And

## RED MORNING

unless that psychology is understood the most perfect literal translation will be incomplete.

It is thus with the word party, which occurs so frequently in communist literature. The word has been correctly rendered into English, but to the Russian it means something very different from what it does to an Englishman. It does not mean a faction or a particular shade of political opinion. The party in Russia is more of an *élite* corps, a priesthood. It is composed of those who are prepared for a certain cause to work harder, to accept less reward, to lead their fellows. In the past Britain has tended to derive her leaders from a certain class, which was supposed to have prepared itself for office in virtue of a special type of education and a certain social background. In Russia the leadership comes from the party in the Russian sense—a group of people who have studied and prepared themselves for a special, difficult, and onerous task in the life of the nation.

Democracy in Russia has never died in the lower grades whatever may have happened at the top. There seems something essentially peculiar to the Russian character in this inversion of the Western way of thought. In the old days it was the Mir and the Zemstvo that reflected the immediate thoughts of the people. Free speech and comment tend to centre on the immediate affairs of life. The larger issues are left to a different kind of authority that sometimes, as in old Novgorod, derives from the will of the people.

It is thus in modern Russia, where in fact the spirit of Novgorod is very strong. There is not a factory or a mine, a tractor station or a farm, which has not its own committee to criticize and make suggestions, to take up abuses and to apportion praise and blame. Every housing community has its committee. Justice itself, as Professor Laski has pointed out, is dispensed by a system that is far more democratic than anything found in the West. The Russian system of democracy might be compared to a system of many rivers that eventually find their way into a single stream—the central government. It is the small rivers that are turbulent and swift-flowing. The main stream is deep and placid but of great potential energy.

That the Russian method suits the Russian people and has produced a strength unsurpassed in modern times is now known to all the world. It is a different freedom, but it is freedom none the less. It is not perfect. Nothing in this world is perfect. It might learn, and probably will learn much, from greater contact with the free peoples of the West, as they in their turn can learn much from the example of the Russian way. What is important for understanding is that freedom is a many-sided thing, a jewel that some view from one angle and others from another, yet from whatever standpoint it is

## THE RUSSIANS

seen it reflects a brilliant and beautiful light. It is not something about which one can dogmatize. There is no right way of freedom, no wrong way.

The ultimate freedom is the right of the people to lead their own lives. It is that at which the democracies of the West aim. It is no less the goal of Soviet planning and Soviet ideology. The tradition of Russia is not the tradition of the West, nor is the latter the tradition of the East. Russia stands Janus-like looking in two directions. To-day, more Janus-like than ever, she stands at the junction of a new age and an old one.

The centre of Russia swayed between Kiev and Novgorod. It shifted to Moscow. It moved on to Petersburg. It has returned to Moscow. And that is significant and symbolic. For Moscow was the capital in which Russia found herself, in which her true nationhood was born. It was the city from which she threw off the domination of the East. In Petersburg she tried to forget the East and become wholly Western. She forgot her past and her destiny. Moscow stands at the centre of Russia proper, neither exclusively East nor exclusively West. It indicates the true role of Russia as the melting-pot of the two great world cultures.

When the red morning dawned over Russia the weather-wise promised a stormy day. The storms have come and gone. There is left the afternoon of brightness and hope. For to-day the Russians have found their freedom, come into the heritage of their own country, after a journey that has lasted more than a thousand years. They are free at last. And they shout aloud their joy of freedom to the World by their readiness to die for it. They are nomads still in soul, ever seeking new adventures and new horizons. And their questing spirit is not afraid of the horizon of death because it knows now that what it leaves behind is life, the life of happiness and plenty, the life that holds the joy of work and difficulty, yet is still living and not a burden.

## BOOK TWO

# RUSSIAN CULTURE

### *Chapter 1*

## THE TRADITION

**T**he development of culture in Russia from the earliest times has been spasmodic. Russia, in culture as in politics, stood apart from the rest of the world. Her early contacts with Greece, through the Euxine colonies, were swept away by the barbarian invasions, and when Russia renewed her contact with Greek thought through the Byzantine Church, that thought had already become fossilized. The well of Attic inspiration had dried up, but even before that it had been polluted by Roman and Alexandrian influences. Classical Greek thought did not come by way of the Greek Church or the Graeco-Roman Empire. What did come was the biased, verbose, and largely irrational systems of the Early Fathers.

By adopting the Byzantine creed Russia, as has been shown in the first book, divorced herself from many of the vivifying influences of the West. The main flood of the Renaissance was diverted from her, though it is true that side eddies and spray splashed some aspects of Russian life. The Tartar invasion had one of its deepest and most lasting effects in stamping on Russian life an imprint of the East.

These and other reasons explain why for so long there is little enough evidence of any Russian influence on European culture. The whole atmosphere was different and the specific contributions Russia might have made to advancing civilization were not made, partly because of the many barriers between East and West and partly



because the West tended to look on Russia as essentially primitive and barbarous. That was characteristic Western mode of thought and that typically Russian habit could, by mutual interaction, combine to produce a greater and livelier synthesis does not seem to have occurred at any period to either side. Peter the Great, the exemplar of westernization, sought to impose Western culture wholesale on his country and tried, by edicts backed by force, to destroy all traces of a native civilization that he regarded as a repulsive survival. It was one of his greatest failings that he failed to grasp the impossibility of imposing from above a new and alien culture on a whole people.

Nor have modern developments altogether swept away this idea that there is something intrinsically better in Western culture as compared with the native growth. In the old days the notion was particularly subscribed to by the ruling class of Petersburg, who were so busy looking out of the window into Europe that they often failed to see the lovely garden nearer at hand. The Bolsheviks have not been guiltless either in this respect. Under their régime the word 'culture' has come to have a somewhat special connotation, embracing everything from brushing one's teeth to the appreciation of painting and music. Now it has seemed to the peasants, rapidly forced up from illiteracy, that what is meant by 'culture' comprises the habits of Western civilization in general and, curiously, those of the United States in particular. Hence in popular usage there has been a tendency to contrast the words 'culture' and 'Russian' as opposites. All this shows, it must be confessed, a very muddled frame of mind on the part of leaders who have been at immense pains to preserve, revive, and foster the distinctively native civilizations of the many varied people comprised within the Soviet Union.

Right from the start, as we have already seen, there has been a tendency for Russian thought to take one of two channels. There have been the Westernizers, and those who regarded everything Western as inherently unsuited to Russia. It was only in the nineteenth century that the latter became known as Slavophiles. This was, however, merely a new and convenient name for a philosophy that had long existed. The Slavophiles contended that the only way of life for the Russians was the Russian way; and this was reflected in literature, art, and music. It was the Slavophiles who 'went to the people' and idealized them. Extreme though their views were, in cultural matters as well as in political, they performed very valuable services in preserving the best in native Russian culture. The more enterprising rulers, like Peter and Catherine, were almost wholly Western in their ideals. It was the presence of Slavophil thought that



put a necessary brake on what might have proved, in the long run, a disastrous factor in Russian life.

True Russian culture springs from the people themselves. This is a fact that cannot be denied. Thus it is that Russian culture has the strength of a folk culture, but also the versatility of one that has refused foreign influences. The power of Russian culture in the West was not felt until recently—literature in the nineteenth century and music in the twentieth particularly. For its understanding, therefore, some picture of the Russian character is essential.

The Russian is a natural thinker. He is fond of argument for argument's sake—it is a national pastime—and there is nothing like argument for sharpening the wits and encouraging the development of individual points of view. It was argument often about quite unimportant themes that schooled the Russian in the art of free expression when all other freedoms were denied him.

This introspectiveness and frankness of opinion is the root of all Russian culture, and it puts that culture in somewhat violent contrast with the culture of the West, where dissimulation is regarded as a virtue and sophistication is one of the higher ideals. No doubt it has arisen out of the Russian conditions of life. During the hard Russian winter, when outside work has been impossible, the Russian has been thrown back upon himself and his fellow-men. He has lived in tightly circumscribed communities with little access to the outer world. And when it is remembered that until very recently illiteracy among the people was the rule rather than the exception, it will be realized that the sharpening of talk through practice became a necessity to the Russian.

Some aspects of Russian culture, even in its higher forms, are held to be naïve. But it is rather native honesty than *naïveté*. The Russian sees nothing wrong in stating a fact or an opinion even though it may be old and has been put forward many times before. He asks only that the fact may be true or the opinion honestly held. There is no wish, as in more sophisticated countries, to avoid the obvious just because it is obvious. To some in the West this gives to Russian thought an appearance of *naïveté*, yet it is one of the sources of Russian freshness. The Russian can look at familiar things with wondering eyes, while the Westerner will perhaps not trouble even to look at all at what he considers commonplace. Novelty-hunting is as much a vice of Western culture as a certain pedestrianism is of the Russian.

These few examples show that there is a fundamental difference between Western culture and Russian culture; but the difference does not create an impassable barrier. To appreciate fully, for

example, the works of Chinese artists one has necessarily to be something of an expert. There are Eastern conventions accepted as commonplace by the Chinese artists the very existence of which is unknown to the average Westerner. This does not apply to the products of Russian culture. Their directness, their concern with the simple things of everyday life and of everyday emotion, their humanity, are all qualities that are universal.

That this is so is proved by the remarkable success that has attended the introduction of Russian culture into other countries. During the nineteenth century Russian literature began to find its way across Europe. As we shall see, the mid-nineteenth century was one of the great periods of Russian literature, so that the works of art then exported attained an extraordinarily high level. Later it was the turn of music. And with the tour of the first Russian Ballet during the first decade of the twentieth century, the whole sweep of Russian art attained a universal success. It came as a revitalizing influence to the West, which was in danger of losing its way in the arid expanses of experimentalism without a purpose.

There seems to be a curious affinity between Russian and English culture, an affinity that might well seem impossible at first sight. Yet its reality cannot be denied. Sir Bernard Pares, that great Russophil, has pointed out that despite all the differences, often vast, of structure, idiom, and vocabulary, there is yet a close resemblance between the Russian and English tongues, and that there is for almost every typically English phrase an almost exact counterpart in Russian. It is clear, therefore, that there must be some deep-seated relationship between the attitudes of the two peoples.

No doubt this explains how it is that Russian literature in translation has become so much a part of the English heritage that much of it is now hardly thought of as foreign, at any rate consciously. Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Chekhov are certainly almost an integral part of English literature, as Turgeniev, Gogol, and Gorky are to a less extent. One finds English men and women who, fully conversant with these Russian writers, are as yet unaware of many English writers of secondary but, it would be thought, greater importance to English people—writers such as Congreve, Donne, Addison, or Richardson.

So too with Russian music. Chaikovsky is one of the most familiar names in English concerts. As a symphonist he is certainly more widely appreciated—and more widely loved—than the slightly later, no less great and certainly far more English Elgar. Russian opera, if not performed in England, attracts in concert extracts a much readier response than the classical repertory of Italian opera and Wagner.

## THE TRADITION

In no country has the example of the Diaghilev Ballet been more successfully followed, and the seed it planted more thoroughly cultivated, than in England.

It is clear that this affinity is due to something more than the appeal of novelty and the effect of passing fashion. The *succès fou* that followed the first Russian Ballets—when every woman wore bracelets and jewellery in honour of Nizhinsky and every up-to-date home had furnishing fabrics *à la* Bakst—died away. But something more solid remained. It was the result of some special appeal of things Russian for the British—and particularly the English—mind and soul. Precisely where this appeal lies and in what it consists must be left to the philosophers and to students of comparative ethnology.

Russian culture may be said in a sense to derive its great strength from the very backwardness of Russia. The Industrial Revolution did not come to Russia till the nineteenth century was well advanced. When England was groaning under the horrible conditions of early industrialism, Russia was still clinging to serfdom. While the serfs in Russia were finding their long-hoped-for freedom was not quite the paradise they had expected, Marx was in England studying and philosophizing on the wage slavery of the factories where child labour was still exploited.

There seems some connection between peasant life and national culture. It has often been remarked that English culture almost disappeared with the English peasant. In the times of Elizabeth England was the premier musical nation of Europe. Yet there was no major composer between the seventeenth-century Purcell and the late nineteenth-century Elgar. And this was precisely the period when the agricultural worker was being forced into the factories and the craftsman was losing his skill in becoming a machine-minder.

Russia escaped this holocaust of tradition. Nineteenth-century industrial development in Russia was neither worse nor better than it was elsewhere. But Russia was too big a country for wholesale and rapid industrialization. Hence the virile peasant tradition from which her culture derives was left largely undisturbed. When in recent years the Soviets began a large-scale industrial revolution in Russia the view that industry was destructive of culture had been abandoned. Thus to-day Russia possesses all her cultural inheritance unpolluted. And it has learnt and is learning from the West. To-day the outlook for Russian culture is brighter than ever. In accordance with the theory of dialectical materialism it is striving for a synthesis between the thesis and antithesis of Slavophilia and Westernism. In time it may well produce a period as outstanding in world history as the golden age of Elizabeth in England.

## Chapter 2

# LITERATURE AND LETTERS

If world appreciation of Russian literature is based chiefly on the great masters of the nineteenth century and, to a less extent, on those who followed them in the present century, that does not mean that Russian literature consists of a sudden and inexplicable efflorescence during these years. On the contrary the Russian tradition is long, and it is not uninteresting to note that one of its mainsprings is similar to that of early English literature: the songs and legends of the Norse people. It was these that the Varangians brought with them when they marched southwards to Kiev, and it was their cousins that gave birth to the great Icelandic sagas.

This influence is noticeable in the chronicles and legends of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when the Varangians had become assimilated to the Rus completely. These documents are marked by a supple lucidity that has all the marks of a high literary craftsmanship. The work of monks, they are not mere records of facts but lively eyewitness accounts of current and recent events seen through the eyes of men who had the power of assessing human character and motives. They have in their purity a keenness of vision and an imaginative turn of phrase and handling that make them literary gems.

The Varangian influence is much stronger in the popular heroic legends of the time. These were the work of the people, no doubt the descendants of the original Varangian 'skalds'. They are the battle-cries of a country fighting for its existence against threats from enemies both within and without. These are the real stuff of folklore. They persisted through the ages, and even after the October Revolution old people could recite versions of them in all parts of the country. The evidence for them is almost entirely oral, except the famous manuscript of *The Tale of the Host of Igor*, which has wound itself inextricably round Russian literature and Russian music.

The Tartar invasion never succeeded in killing all things Russian. On the contrary, the most striking thing about the Mongol occupation is that, though it lasted so long, it failed to obliterate the real Russian character of the land and people. There could, of course, be

no great development of the rich embryonic literature of the pre-Tartar times, but all the same the stream flowed on in a modest way. The legends were still related, perhaps with an added piquancy because they taught of the destruction of the hated foreign invaders. More important still—for folk-lore is a hardy plant that thrives even in unfertile soil—the local chronicles were continued in many districts, later to become mines of information to the historian and examples of the slow development of literary skill with the years.

It was, curiously enough, during the Middle Ages, when Russia was groping her way hesitatingly and not without pain towards nationhood, that the lamp of literature seemed on the point of expiring. The old monkish tradition of chronicling the events of the times vanished and there was not yet enough literacy or freedom of thought to permit of the production of an independent literature. Still more curious is the fact that there is one name that stands out in this period of almost total eclipse. It is that of Ivan the Terrible. The letters of this autocrat are remarkable for their fine phrase and their acuteness of perception. And they are the work of a man who had the artistic urge for self-revelation. In reading them one becomes aware of a person very different from the barbarous sadist who made a record, head by head, of his tortures and executions. One is conscious of a man convinced of his own smallness and insignificance in relation to the great events of life, and one is led to speculate on what Ivan might have been if he had been brought up on more normal lines and had not had the seeds of perversion planted in him at an early age.

But for one other notable writing this age is barren. The barrenness is a vivid reminder that Russia stood apart from the Renaissance which elsewhere was leading to an almost hothouse growth of literary and artistic plants. Ivan was a contemporary of Elizabeth, let it be remembered. Russia's infertility must be set, in time, against the time of Shakespeare and Marlowe, Fletcher and Raleigh, Sidney and Herrick.

The one other book mentioned above is the story of Avvakum, a priest who bitterly opposed the innovations of Patriarch Nikon and was one of the first leaders of the Raskol. This narrative has a directness and life that make it almost contemporary.

Folk-lore must have flourished during this and the succeeding periods, else it would not have survived so late. But it was a folk-lore withdrawn from the literate class. The two nations of Russia were being finally formed and the inheritance of legend that should have been common to all the Russians was taken by the peasants into the long night of their trial.

Peter did nothing for literature as he added little to the sum total of Russian culture. His love of the West was not confined to material things. With him came a spate of foreign words, mainly for the foreign things he introduced. This is, of course, a feature of technological innovation derived from other countries; it has a notable counterpart in the additions to the Russian vocabulary during the period of the first Five-Year Plan of the Soviets. Peter had his corps of translators, his armies of experts; and they produced books. But there is nothing in the huge output in the new Petrian alphabet that could be called literature.

Yet there is one striking feature of Peter's reign. It produced the first notable Russian publicist, Pososhkov. It is not entirely without significance that this remarkable man was a peasant who had educated himself. He wrote with directness and vigour, and has left behind some illuminating sidelights on the reign of Peter, a ruler to whom he gave the whole of his admiration. It was Pososhkov who coined the famous description of Peter as a man pulling alone uphill while millions were pulling downhill. The phrase illuminates the entire relations of Peter to the Russian people.

One of the great fallacies of conventional history is that Catherine the Great enriched Russian culture and particularly Russian literature. In fact she did nothing of the kind. She was, because of her origins, even more Western than Peter. She was not, as Peter had been, an imitator, but a Western European on the Russian throne. She admired all things French and the literature of her day tends to become an uninspired copy of French fashions of the day. There is nothing natural about it. It does not spring from the natural impulses of a people. It is an exotic plant in unfamiliar and not very nourishing soil.

Catherine's attempts to gallicize Russian literature were doomed to failure for two reasons: the first, the fundamental one, was that no nation can copy the literary tradition of another—especially when the nations concerned were as different as despotic Russia and France on the eve of the Revolution; the second—that Russian literature had already been reborn in the reign of Catherine's predecessor, Elizabeth—perhaps the only event for which that insignificant and in some ways repulsive Empress has cause to be remembered.

Lomonosov, the father of modern Russian literature, was a man of wide sympathies and an almost universal culture. He was alive to all the currents of Western thought, yet he had the essential Russianness to translate them into terms of his own idiom. He was a genius in himself. But his real greatness lies in the fact that he inspired the long and brilliant line of Russian poets. Even Catherine's



own poets, men who by draconic decree tried to force the Russian tongue into the tripping metres of the *Roi Soleil* and, failing, took to writing in not very good French, came under his influence and grew enthusiastic for the possibilities of really native art.

It was this brilliant beginning that led to an even more brilliant sequel for it brought forth almost immediately the genius of Pushkin. Pushkin was one of those rare literary geniuses who are masters of every form they undertake. His letters are as outstanding in their perfection as his dramas, his fairy-tales in verse as his prose stories. His secret lies in that absolute simplicity which can be used with success only by the great artist whose vision is so clear and so beautiful that it must be put down in the clearest possible terms.

Pushkin stands out in Russian literature as Shakespeare in English, Goethe in German, or Dante in Italian. He has quality all his own, and it is the evanescence of this quality which has the beauty of brilliant sunlight that makes him so difficult to translate. Here and there his works have been superbly done into English, but the bulk of his work lies beyond the power of even the most sympathetic translator. He was a poet whose images rose spontaneously in his native tongue, and his whole power lies in the unique aptness of his words and the economy of their use. Pushkin is the great exception to the rule that Russian writers tend to become adopted in England. And the loss to England is the greatest she could have sustained in this connection.

Pushkin has been described as the man who taught Russia the arts. That may be slight overstatement, but it is certainly true that he fostered the great school of literature which the first half of the nineteenth century produced in Russia. He was never unwilling to give advice and encouragement to younger writers, and his fame never made him inaccessible. One of his greatest followers was Lermontov, whose reputation is steadily growing in this country, while another, better known in England, was Gogol, who shows a depth of human sympathy that appeals to the English taste.

The nineteenth century produced that great galaxy of writers who placed the Russian among the leading literatures of the world. Turgeniev, Tolstoy, and Dostoievsky are household words in England, and there is little need to dilate on their work. The great creative tide seemed to be ebbing in the 'eighties of the last century when another great genius, loved as his predecessors had been in England, was produced. This was Anton Chekhov, whose delicate irony and deep knowledge of country life give him a special place in Russian literature. Maxim Gorky also made his bow about this time. His career was extraordinary. A self-educated man of humble origin,



he attracted attention by the virility of his short stories and other prose writings. Many saw in him a coming genius who might eventually stand side by side with Tolstoy. There followed a period of decline and almost of eclipse. But with the Revolution he again rose to prominence and became the father of the new Soviet school of writers.

In the years before the war of 1914-18 a new school of poets seemed to be coming into existence, at first inspired by that genius of leadership in the arts, Sergei Diaghilev. These included Alexander Blok, who died however when the Revolution was a few years old, just as he seemed on the point of realizing to the full his early promise. The Soviet régime has not so far produced any outstanding poet, but it has brought to the fore a number of notable novelists and short-story writers. Alexis Tolstoy and Michael Sholokhov are two Soviet writers who have already won a reputation outside the Soviet Union. The former, a nephew of the great Leo Tolstoy, has the family genius in the handling of great themes, as in his quasi-fictional biography of Peter the Great. The latter made fame with *And Quiet Flows the Don*, which was a best-seller in England and America, though his later work, *And Then the Harvest*, is probably deeper and richer. Writers in the U.S.S.R. enjoy almost ideal conditions for creative work, and are spared the strain that tells on authors in capitalist countries, though they are also the most favoured class in the new Russia.

In philosophy Russia has no great names to show. Solovyov and Leontiev were probably the nearest approach to a Russian Locke or Kant. But there is little system in their work. It is not in the Russian character to reduce thought to an abstract system. The free imaginative way of art comes more naturally. The German is not satisfied till he has classified and systematized. The Russian is happiest when he lets his fancy run free. But there is a wealth of philosophical thought in Russian letters. The Russian writer will make an allegory of a short story and will present the result of a lifetime's thought on existence in a novel, where the interchange of views and ideas through dialogue provides the natural Russian way of striking to the heart of a topic.

The vigour of all Russian literature and letters since the time of Pushkin is remarkable, and it is to be noted how closely it has been associated with the people. It was through writers—among whom Gleb Uspensky was outstanding—that the Russians learnt the truth about peasant life under serfdom and immediately afterwards. And it was Leo Tolstoy who struck hardest at the armour of privilege. Chekhov in his milder way satirized the futility of existence among

the country gentry and the official classes. Dostoevsky hit maliciously at some of the abuses of Russian society.

Russian literature has sometimes been decried as 'literature with a purpose'. But this is the best way of misunderstanding it. All art has a purpose. The term 'purposeless art' is a contradiction. That the Russian prefers to express his indignation or philosophy in an art form does not lessen the value of his creation. From his point of view it enhances it, because he expresses his own reaction to his environment and thought in the medium that is most natural to him. It is this which accounts, above all else, for the clarity and cohesion of all the great Russian writers. What they produced was the inevitable outcome of their own special experience.

Russian literature more than any other art has shown great tendency to support the people against their oppressors, the Tsars and the nobles. That is the reason perhaps why the literature has been described as tendentious and propagandist. Nothing however would be further from the truth than this assertion, because the Russian writer is essentially an artist. He exults in the achievement of his people, or he weeps with them in their sorrows. He is a son of these very people and he fights in their way to overcome their predicaments. But here ceases the parallel between a propagandist and a Russian artist. Life for the great Russian writer is a spiritual adventure, a breath-taking adventure, unfolded on a limitless plain. Nothing in Russia is fixed; nothing stable or final. And the artist is the only man who can concentrate on this scene. Contour, colour, whims of character, all strike a distinct note in the receptive soul of the writer, and he expresses them as a definite whole, as a unity in itself. The elements of everyday life, popular joys, cries from oppression, sorrows, and bereavements, all these are recorded by the sensitive pen of the artist. Here again these scenes are like beautiful images set in the framework of an idyll, with details minute and clear in a perspective of distant reminiscence. In these pictures reality is mixed inexorably with unreality. Nothing is definite. Every word strikes a chord which is suggestive as music. There is some kind of transparency even in the unreality when outlined by the writer.

And yet there is a sense of real Russian apprehension of this reality. When a scene is described one gets the impression that the image is half seen and half lost in mist. The sight provokes wonderful desires of something to come more than is expressed in words. One perceives the idea that the writer wants us to plunge onwards in search of something that is just out of our reach but nevertheless lies just round the corner, beyond the beautiful sunset or enveloped in the darkness of night, yet attainable to us if we can only reach

out our hand and pierce the darkness that surrounds it. There is double meaning in every word of the Russian writer. This is not necessarily a mysticism but an artistic trick used by his genius. Such wonderful pictures of the real and unreal unfolded simultaneously one perceives in practically every poem or prose work of Turgeniev. Every line of his 'First Love' or 'Klara Milich' is a shining example of this artistic mysticism. Turgeniev is not alone. Leo Tolstoy's novels express the same restless, inquiring mind that calls us on to pierce the mysteries of everyday life. They are wonderful expressions of the author's own life in a fierce determination not only to solve these mysteries but to bring forth the beauty that the Russian peasant nurtures in his bosom.

Another trend in the Russian writings is the sense of asceticism—a denial of even the smallest pleasure and necessity of life—as if to punish oneself for the wrongs that have been done to the Russian people. These ascetic principles are best emphasized in Tolstoy's writings during his latter years. They are not philosophical problems or inquiries, but rather they are the final steps of a fearless life's journey and the realization that at last the real meaning of life has been discovered. Asceticism as meant by the Russian writers Tolstoy and Dostoevsky could be described as being a complete refusal, tacit or loudly expressed, to recognize any limits or to accept any provisional barriers. It is an eagerness to assert unusual aspects of that complex human nature, a desire to discover what man actually is in himself. Obviously such a purpose cannot have limits, cannot be dictated either by internal or external laws. It is like a twilight of autumn evenings that spreads over all, penetrating even the smallest corner of the plain that is limitless and boundless like the plain of life. Human nature has no limits: endless possibilities of sin and goodness are intertwined in the human being, and when the writer expresses these very virtues and failings he too has to be limitless; and he will revolt against any oppressions which hamper his artistic sense of beauty, justice, sorrow, or oppression.

Morbidity is yet another trend in which Russian literature abounds. Dostoevsky is the most outstanding example of this artistic morbidity. This writer's search after the macabre cannot be termed pure artistic curiosity. He does not express a pathological sense of sadism, but it is unavoidably bound to lead the artist into unusual and strange byways of the complex human nature. Dostoevsky's writings are full of such morbid sadness that ranges from wistful pensiveness right through all the degrees of human pessimism and depression to an insupportable and inevitable gloom. It is a sense of revenge against the injustices of life, and one is bound to find a

certain deep moral instinct that has prompted the writer to record the tribulations in the souls of murderers, condemned exiles, or psychological perverts. Dostoevsky's artistic perception of life has yet remained strictly moral. It has a meaning and purpose, but again, as all Russian writers are prone to do, he makes this meaning elusive, unapprehensible. From the artistic point of view this very elusiveness gives to his writings an attractive power and a desire to pursue this elusive meaning, knowing that it will lead us through the dark mysteries of negation and sin. The meaning of life is implicit in life itself; it cannot be considered separately. The complexity of human nature is such that whether one praises its beauty or derides or deplores its sins and degradations, one can do so with a definite moral purpose.

All these artistic feelings of the Russian writers were strictly interwoven with the conditions of everyday life of the Russian people. All Russian artists, without exception, fought with the pen for the rights of the people; and when they realized that artistic writings were not enough they threw away their pens in the dust and took up the sword and fought and died on the battlefield. Only if we consider Russian literature in this sense can we understand why this great literature suddenly declined during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. This literary decline coincides with a reactionary political oppression, which was to reach its climax at the time of Alexander II's assassination. The period is known as one of endless and ruthless persecution. Ideas of emancipation and great reforms were then but a dim memory. The old writers who enhanced these new ideas were also but a dim memory, and the new generation that arose were convinced they could serve their people better with sword and rifle. Even when patriots such as Dobroliubov and Pisarev wrote as well as fought, their writings had nothing of the former artistic beauty. They were tirades full of fire and exultation. They were incitements to glory and glorification of death on the battlefield. That is the reason why the poetical beauty was lost. If there is a constant note it is a macabre tune of martial music, of a march of dead souls that have vanished purposelessly for a cause that is not their own, or have been slaughtered in the dark precincts of the Tsarist prisons. This summarizes the idea of Nihilist literature—a name that derives from the men who assassinated the Tsar: the Nihilists.

Finally, in order to complete the analysis of Russian literature one must mention also the trend of the inevitable fatalistic resignation to something that had to come, no matter what you did, whether you fought for it or simply allowed yourself to be swept along by it. Tolstoy is also a good example of this negative inevitable depression.

His last writings are full of that fatalistic sense of hopelessness. Yet again the human desire to fight no matter how hopeless the situation is, could be seen as a thin streak of light running through this dark abyss of despair. Russian people are devout people; when in hopeless despair they always turn to religion; and their writers are no exception. When they realized that everything they did was of no avail their souls turned to the unseen and they finished their writings on a note of religious farewell which often ended in a religious mysticism or mania.

The final expression of the mood of the Russian people was given in their beautiful poetry. Here more than anywhere else the poet finds an outlet for all the things he feels. All the time the poet is essentially Russian, whether he sings of his childhood when he grew up among trees, flowers, and butterflies, which have given him such delight, or whether he dances exuberantly to the playful tunes of folk-lore; and he expresses all this in the melodious and sonorous Russian tongue that is like music in itself. This kind of Russian poetry is boisterous: it expresses in buoyant exaggeration all the trivial things for the mere pleasure of hearing the sound of the Russian words, their lilt, their melody, their harmonies, and their resonance. Russian poetry is improvisation, it is a faculty of the most mystically expressed, fleeting, ethereal emotions. Deep harmony of music and verse wander down together in aimless sway, while the poet praises the things he so much cherishes. We can almost sing together with Balmont:

*I came into the world to see the sun and blue horizons,  
I came to see the sun and mountain heights,  
The sea and rich colours of the vale.  
I have embraced the worlds in one single glance,  
I am a sovereign. I have conquered cold oblivion  
In fashioning my dream. Every moment I am full of revelation.  
I am ever singing. It was suffering that called forth my dream,  
But love too is mine.  
Who is my fellow in power of song? Not one, not one.  
I came into the world to see the sun,  
And if daylight fail I will sing,  
I will sing of the sun in my mortal hour.*

Poetry however could not remain boisterous if it was to express the sorrow as well of the Russian people. It is also full of passion and hate. A desire of self-destruction. An art that one feels has been carefully chosen with a singleness of aim. Its manner is one of cold dignity and reserve. It has no time for frivolous display of emotion

## LITERATURE AND LETTERS

unless absolutely necessary. The passion for verse among these poets is not mere music but real and true poetry in the broadest sense. The gloomy Russian poetry is enemy to facile enthusiasm and vague generalization. The gloomy poet exults in the suffering of the body and his own destruction. He welcomes the forces of destruction because he feels that regeneration can come only after complete annihilation. What more shining example could there be than the passionate tirade of the poet Valery Briusov:

*Where are ye, O ye coming Huns  
Who are hanging like a cloud over the world?  
I hear your leaden tramp on Pamirs  
Yet hidden from our eyes. Fall upon us  
From your dark camps a drunken horde,  
And quicken our decrepit bodies with a wave of flaming blood.  
And we the wise men and poets,  
The guardians of mystery and fate, shall bear away  
Our lighted candles into catacombs, deserts, and caves.  
It may be that everything will perish that was known to us alone.  
But you who destroy me I meet with a hymn of welcome.*

Not all poets are boisterous or gloomy, poetry can live for the sake of poetry. It is not necessary to express definite feelings or have definite aim. It can use such means as hints and half-tones. It can build suggestive images and with music reveal such a passion for remote beauty, such a fine sensitiveness to sorrowful and exquisite meanings, that it can transform even dusty corners of the streets and the dim squalor of slums into a sight of dignity and beauty. Verse of this kind is usually obscure. It does not relate, it simply suggests; but we feel the vibrations of this music touch feelings that are beyond the reach of words. This poetry records with intense sincerity the life of the broken spirit of the Russian people that finds only in this way an expression and momentary solution of the problem of its deep sorrow. A constant trend is pessimism and we can best express this by wandering together with Feodor Sologub into the dark labyrinths of vice and despair:

*A sad, pale shadow,  
A narrow winding way,  
A dreary and gloomy day.  
O heart, forget about freedom,  
Thou art pale and sad with longing,  
Thy breast breathes wearily.  
Dreams are shy and hardly come,  
O heart, forget about happiness.*

## RUSSIAN CULTURE

It is very interesting to note that although the period of Soviet culture in Russia has not produced great poets and writers, nevertheless it has retained the essential trends of Russian prose and poetry. Here too the poets spring from the people and they sing and write for them. And as they feel the same feelings and talk the same language as the peasant of Soviet Russia, they naturally express very clearly all that the Russian people feel. And as long as this trend in Russian literature remains it will always be one of the greatest exponents of Russian culture.



### Chapter 3

## MUSIC, OPERA, AND BALLET

**T**he Russians are a nation of singers and dancers. The tradition of the Orthodox Church has greatly assisted the development of singing, for instrumental music is unknown in the Russian service, and the perfection of choirs has for centuries been one of the aims of the clergy. Not only the special choirs but also many of the priests themselves attained an amazingly high standard. Naturally the Russian seems to sing his emotions, and this is specially true of the peasants of Ukraine and of the Cossacks.

Russian singing has developed on rather unusual lines. As might be expected, the influence of the Orthodox chant can be traced even in the most irreligious folk-songs, and not least in the amazing variety of tone-colour produced from voices. The Church insisted on all-male choirs, and this has resulted in those two most typical of Russian voices—the high tenor, almost an alto, and the contrabass. English people have become familiar with the novel effects of these voices and of the combination of sounds they can produce when used in choirs. The performances of the various Don Cossack choirs which have visited this country are good examples, especially when singing such striking songs as 'Monotonously Rings the Little Bell'.

In formal music outside Church liturgy Russia was a late comer, but, as with literature, a brilliant school of composers arose almost simultaneously and gave to Russian music a world importance. The first Russian composer of eminence was Glinka, whose opera, *A Life for the Tsar*, though now under an altered title, is still performed in Soviet Russia. It was first given in 1836, the first native opera; and in the century that followed Russian music went from strength to strength. Immediately on the heels of Glinka and his less eminent but none the less interesting contemporaries came those composers on whom the fame of Russian music is based. They were known as 'Les Cinq' or as the Balakirev circle, which included Balakirev himself, Rimsky-Korsakov, Borodin, Moussourgsky, and César Cui.

History gave to Rimsky-Korsakov the leading position among these composers, though to some extent at the expense of the reputation of the others. Rimsky-Korsakov was an amateur, an officer in the Navy, but he developed his musical talent early and he deserted

the sea fairly early to make music his career. He was almost entirely self-taught, but he was never inclined to overrate his own powers. It is recorded that when he was offered a professorship at the St. Petersburg Conservatoire he had to be persuaded, for he wished to refuse on account of his ignorance of theory.

But there is nothing of the amateur about his music. He is one of the world's greatest masters of orchestration and tone colour. There is not one of his works that does not sparkle, and there is a curious reflection of the oriental strain in Russian life in all he did. His love of dance rhythms, not only of his own country but also of Spain, dominates his subtle and distinctive rhythms, and the fascination of Eastern themes for him is shown in such works as the *Sheherazade*. His operas were based principally on native folk themes—as, for example, *The Golden Cockerel*. Rimsky-Korsakov's music is baroque. It is Byzantine. It talks of the glitter of the East and the barbaric splendour of early Russia.

Rimsky-Korsakov is important not only for his own remarkable output but also for the vast amount of editing of scores he did for his contemporaries and friends, Borodin and Moussourgsky. Borodin, originally a professor of chemistry, in which he gained some distinction, was a man of inspiration but little order. He would begin works and leave them unfinished. He would complete scores and then lose part of them. Rimsky-Korsakov took many of these works in hand and put them into shape, but while this served to establish his reputation, there is no doubt that something of the essential Borodin was lost. His greatest work was the opera, *Prince Igor*, one of the few Russian operas familiar to England, both in fragments and in its entirety, but his symphonies show also an original musical thought and an unusual skill.

Moussourgsky is best known by his *Boris Godunov*, an opera deriving jointly from Russian history and work of Pushkin. It was first heard in this country in the form revised by Rimsky-Korsakov, but latterly the original has been given, and the difference is most marked. He had not Rimsky-Korsakov's skill in instrumentation nor the same kind of brilliant development. But his genius was unmistakable and some of his works, particularly of the more sombre, mysterious kind, are standard items in the orchestral repertoire.

With Balakirev and César Cui, both of whom are relatively less important, these three composers represent the essentially Slavophil influence in Russian music. They derived their inspiration from the poetry and folk-lore of the people. There is scarcely a work of theirs in which folk-tunes, skilfully and brilliantly developed, do not appear. But there is nothing mannered about it, no sense of revival,

## MUSIC, OPERA, AND BALLET

such as there is in much of the recent English folk-tune school, for the simple reason that they were using living tunes of the people and not carefully recovered revivals.

The Western influence was also at work in Russian music under the leadership of the Rubinstein, two brilliant pianist brothers. Their music was for some time better known in the West than that of the Slavophil school, because it was more readily acceptable to Western ears. Though a considerable force in their time, the Rubinstein are to-day remembered chiefly as great executant musicians and teachers. There was no spontaneity in their work, which was too academic. It had not the spark of life. A recent revival in this country of the once much-praised 'Ocean' Symphony revealed this work to be merely good second-rate.

Best-known of all, of course, is Piotr Chaikovsky, who is to-day probably the orchestral composer most popular in this country. He stands midway between the Slavophil and the Western schools. He drew lavishly on native themes for his works, whether he was turning Pushkin into opera, as in *Eugen Onegin*, in writing great ballets like *Swan Lake*, or in composing string quartets and songs. Yet his technique, despite innovations, was largely traditional and classical. His instrumentation is brilliant, but not with the barbaric splendour of Rimsky-Korsakov. Emotionally, Chaikovsky tended to wear his heart on his sleeve, as in the 'Pathetic' Symphony, and he had a liking for tragic themes, as in the *Romeo and Juliet* fantasy overture. It is this—his directness and his entire lack of reserve in stating his emotions—that make him easy to understand; that and his amazing powers of melodic invention which, in some of his symphonies, almost crowd out the possibilities of development.

With the passing of these giants it looked as though there might be a hiatus in the growth of Russian music. Skriabin and Liadov appeared to be the sole hopes. But later on, in the second decade of the present century, a new and vigorous school seemed to be rising, largely owing to the encouragement of Diaghilev. Chief among its members is Igor Stravinsky, whose early work, *Fireworks*, attracted the attention of Diaghilev, under whose inspiration he was to produce first *The Firebird* and then that great ballet masterpiece, *Petrushka*. His later work of the first period, such as *The Rites of Spring*, aroused controversy, but is now seen to be of the highest significance in the development of modern music. To-day many critics regard him as outstanding among modern composers.

If Stravinsky, with his mastery of orchestral colour, his fearlessness and inventiveness in the use of new instrumental devices—as, for example, the bassoon opening of *The Rites of Spring*—was the

immediate and legitimate successor of Rimsky-Korsakov (his love of folk legend is another similarity linking him with the same composer), Rakhmaninov is the true successor of Chaikovsky. Rakhmaninov is a lesser figure than either Chaikovsky or Stravinsky. He has little of the thematic invention of the former; indeed he overdevelops single themes in his major works, and there is a remarkable similarity between themes from quite different compositions. And he certainly has none of Stravinsky's restless pioneering spirit. One finds little that is new or striking in Rakhmaninov's work, which is yet easily assimilated and does not strike one as merely facile.

Under the Soviets music has made progress. In the early days there was an outbreak of violent experimentalism, which reached its peak in such amazing representational pieces as Mossolov's *Steel Foundry*. But this was a phase, and under the new dispensation of 'People's Art', which enjoins on artists a criterion of writing for the people as a whole rather than for the satisfaction of their own innate artistic urge, there has been much simplification—and it must be confessed not a little dullness. Shostakovich is the best-known in this country of the younger Soviet school. His early work had astonishing vitality and included both symphonies and opera. Later he was relegated to the background on ideological grounds, his music being adjudged too involved and advanced from the standpoint of people's art; but more recently he has again come to the fore, and the latest of his compositions to be heard in this country, the 'Leningrad' Symphony, while it hardly attains the standards of promise of his youth, shows every sign of a reawakening musical consciousness and artistic integrity. Since 1941 the works of many hitherto unknown Soviet composers have been given first performances in this country and have met with success. There is in fact ample evidence that music is very much alive in modern Russia even if, with the possible exception of Shostakovich, no really outstanding figure has so far appeared.

Intimately connected with the development of music in Russia has been the ballet. The inherent desire of the Russians to dance has here found formalized artistic expression. Under the immediate patronage of the Tsars and the Grand Dukes, the Imperial Ballets of Moscow and St. Petersburg provided a training ground for ballet unequalled in any part of the world. It is true that these ballets were hardly people's art, but rather the cultivated luxury of the leisured class, much as opera became in this country. All the same, the basis rested on a firm footing of a national characteristic, for without the native talent the great technical achievement of the schools would have been impossible of attainment.

## MUSIC, OPERA, AND BALLET

The ballet is never far from Russian music. One feels it in Chaikovsky's symphonies, and his substitution of the valse for the scherzo in some of these is an indication of his absorption in dance forms. His works written for the Imperial Ballets—*Swan Lake*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, *Casse-noisette*—are among the finest ballet music ever written. But all these ballets are of classical conception. They owe their origin to the old Italian ballet, the tradition of which was kept alive in the twin capitals of Russia. They have not those characteristics that Russian Ballet acquired as the result of the pre-1914 tours of the Diaghilev companies.

Diaghilev was one of the most extraordinary geniuses of his time. He was not primarily a creative artist in the sense of being a musician, a poet, or a painter. But he had the extraordinary power of recognizing genius in others and bringing it to fruition—probably a fruition it would never have attained by itself. This applied as much to foreign artists with whom he came in contact as to Russian ones. More remarkable still, he had an uncanny ability of securing team work among individual artists of the greatest talent—an immensely difficult task. Diaghilev was one of the great integrators of art; and it was this which made his ballet outstanding, a fresh adventure in a virtually new field of art.

It is not generally realized that Diaghilev's first company was a State company given special leave to tour abroad—a concession the securing of which was an immense tribute to his powers of persuasion. In Fokine he had a dancer and choreographer of outstanding genius. He commanded the services of artists like Bakst and of composers like Stravinsky. He had the amazing art of dancers like Nizhinsky and Karsavina at his disposal. And he welded all these into a unity of the highest artistic merit. He created a new conception and tradition of the dance which will eternally be associated with Russia. Later his dancers found themselves unable to return to Russia, but he managed to keep his company alive, to strengthen it, and to attract new talent not only from Russia but from the various countries of the world he visited.

Russian Ballet was a vitalizing influence on each of its constituent arts, and its force is still alive. Diaghilev's death interrupted rather than stopped the growth of ballet. Before the war Colonel de Basil and René Blum were gathering together the strands that had become scattered and tangled when they fell from Diaghilev's hands. A new international school of Russian ballet was being created.

Meanwhile in Russia itself the ballet has been fostered and developed by the Soviets. In Moscow the standard is at least as high as ever it was in imperial days, and the work of the erstwhile imperial

schools has gone forward without interruption. New influences in the ballet have been due to the interest of the Government in the various national cultures of the non-Russian peoples in the Union and the time is probably not far off when, with the return of peace, a new Russian Ballet will astonish the world.

If literature was a necessity to the Russian people, we can truly say that music and dances were the daily bread on which they lived, they were the daily air which they breathed. There are no people in the world wholly unmusical. However, there are nations that treat music only as an exceptional activity, as an occasional yielding to that innate human impulse. They take music in a rationed form as an occasional delightful but exotic food that they like to taste, knowing full well that they will get indigestion should they indulge to excess. Such is not the case with the Russians. They simply live and delight in music. Russian air is full of musical tunes, and people walking around are continuously humming some playful song. Be it a peasant bent on his hard toil in the field, or a poor woman sweating under the heavy load which she carries on her back, or girls and boys walking hand-in-hand on Sundays and holidays, they have one thing in common—they sing endlessly. Words and tunes are often inseparable. They are so intimately connected with dancing as well that the one without the other sounds incomplete. Their songs are beautiful because they express the simple sentiments of the people. And the songs are accompanied with the whining melodies of accordion or balalaika, the latter being the famous Russian lyre that has become popular the world over. Wedding ceremonies, christenings, thanksgiving for the plentiful harvest, or even rebellions against the evil spirit, are all expressed with music. Many a night one can hear drunken peasants on their way home humming horribly discordantly some folk tunes. More often than not these songs are interrupted by shoutings and breaking of legs and heads; and more often than not again after the brawl the singing is renewed. Even the injured is carried on a stretcher to the nearest hospital to the accompaniment of his singing friends.

What more beautiful and convincing expression could there be than music when the Russian desires to show his emotions? No country has held more popular and in greater esteem the wandering bard or 'bayan'—the singer of heroic deeds, the mourner of departed dear ones, or the inciter to a bloody revenge that is the peasant's due. There are songs of the seasons, ritual songs reminiscent of the days past when worship of Nature's forces and evil pagan gods were observed. No natural phenomenon could pass without being glorified or torn down to the accompaniment of music and song.



## MUSIC, OPERA, AND BALLET

Motives for the popular music of Russia are plentiful. One has to stop and listen to the cheerful babbling of the little mountain stream, or the mournful rustling of the leaves moved by the morning breeze, to appreciate the ease with which the Russian composes his tunes. Naturally, music derived from the rich folk-lore takes first place: not the folk music heard in concert hall, changed and distorted to please the refined tastes of an exigent audience, but the folk music that one hears in its natural environment. On the fields and in the forests are heard the true Russian songs. Perhaps the voices are harsh and untrained, perhaps they are unrhythmical, but they are nevertheless in a harmony which dominates all else. One feels in the air the expression of monotony, sorrow, and solitude, or the tunes of joy and hope; all of these blend together with the natural tunes that the Russian Land is full of. No human emotion is left behind. There is sad music and gay music, heroic music and humorous. There are folk melodies that are more like mad laughs of people inebriated, or others that are a cry of souls mortally wounded. Is it then a wonder that the Russian musicians, the ones who interpreted these folk melodies, have become so popular not only in Russia but the world over? Listen to Chaikovsky's 'Fifth Symphony' or Borodin's 'Prince Igor' and one is transported subconsciously into the plains and mountains of Russia which serve as motifs of these masterpieces.

Another peculiar motive is the gipsy motive. The songs that are played and sung by wandering gipsies, either in chorus or singly, have no direct connection with the Russian people. They do not express exactly their deep emotions. They are playful tunes, using the erotic, superficial, bizarre feelings of the people. Invariably accompanied by appropriate music and suggestive dances they never fail to excite popular enthusiasm.

Of course it would be a grave omission not to mention the Church and the Russian religious rites as being one of the most popular motives for Russian music. These religious motives, although varied in theme and glorification, have one thing in common—they are always old, as old as the Russian Church; they never progress, they never change with time. Religious hymns, whether composed a hundred years ago or only of late, are always similar in their mournful, melancholy, dignified melody. They use only a few notes; their keys are simple, but no other music in Russia can evoke so easily tears and sobs in the simple worshippers as these masterpieces of the Russian Church.

To conclude, we have to admit that the Soviet régime has influenced but very little the trend of Russian music. Many leaders tried to force the new Soviet music into a particular channel and



## RUSSIAN CULTURE

the result was a horrible conglomeration that stirred nothing in the souls of the listeners. They had to abandon every restriction or direction imposed upon the composers so that the music might swing back to its original theme and motives of folk-lore, gipsy dances, landscape, and religion.

## Chapter 4

# ART AND ARCHITECTURE

While the high position of Russia in literature, music, and ballet is universally admitted, it is often alleged that Russia has done little in the plastic and graphic arts. This, like so many generalizations, is somewhat far from the truth.

It is true that there is no great Russian artist to set by the side of Michelangelo and Rembrandt. Russian painting and sculpture do indeed, as a whole, show a distinct mediocrity and have none of the fine and sensitive imagination which distinguishes Russian effort in the other arts. The Soviets have done little to alter this state of affairs. The criterion of people's art is applied to painting no less than to music and literature, and it tends to induce a spirit of representational realism that is somewhat disappointing.

But if there are no landscapes, no portraits, over which the art connoisseur can rave, there is one branch of graphic art in which Russia has a place to herself. That is in the production of ikons, or holy pictures. This was the one form of graphic art encouraged by the Church, which did not permit the making or painting of religious statues. There was none of that lavish patronage of painting by the Church which produced in Italy the great works of Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci. This accounts in large measure for the relative poverty of painting in the usual sense in Russia, for painting has never been purely a people's art, as music and the telling of stories are.

The ancient ikons however are works of great art. They were produced, it is true, to conform to an ecclesiastical tradition, but so were the great works of the Italian school. They were, too, inspired by a deeply religious fervour that gave them an authority rarely seen in creations of this kind. The ikon painters took the tradition in the first place from Byzantium which, in turn, had compounded it of Greek and Persian ingredients. But the result was typically and unmistakably Russian.

Painting is an art of slow growth. It rarely springs into sudden efflorescence as literature and music are apt to do, and this may be because it has not the same kind of popular sources on which to draw. And Russian painting was never given a chance to develop.

It is here that the barriers between Russia and Western Europe have been particularly harmful to Russia.

When at last those barriers were thrown down by Peter the Great, native art had little or no chance to imbibe the rich experience of the West and turn it to its own uses. Peter's ideal was complete imitation of the West, and this view, as we have seen, was intensified by Catherine. The Tsars, the grand dukes, the wealthy nobles, bought French and Italian pictures—or, under Peter's influence, Dutch ones. They never thought, as the aristocracy in European countries did, of acting as patrons to their own artists. The result was that where Russian painters were able to work at all they became uninspired imitators of the fashions current in the West. If they painted a Russian landscape, it was a copy of a French model. Their interior scenes simulated the Dutch masters. There was neither life nor originality in any of their work. Much the same conditions existed in the sphere of sculpture.

However, lest the impression be given that Russian graphic art is entirely negligible, one is bound to mention that there were Russian painters of great genius: insipid but colourful landscapes romantically painted by Shishkin; magnificent oriental scenes full of warmth and life created by the painter Vereshchagin; or vivid portraits by Ge and Riepin; all are shining examples of the primitive but original Russian graphic art.

Here too, as in music and literature, nearly all the painters are of real peasant origin. Illa Riepin is a born genius peasant, who never went to any school. His art is self-taught and his paintings are a product of sheer high spirits and an irresistible delight in the art of painting. The famous painting 'The Haulers', depicting vividly a rugged but picturesque band of labourers on the great River Volga, is a classic example of his art. No Riepin painting ever fails to awaken a deep emotion in the soul of the Russians. It will be impossible too not to mention his portrait of the barefoot Tolstoy which always arouses real and genuine emotions.

As an exponent of the Russian landscape one cannot find a better example than the typically Russian Levitan. This painter entered better than anybody else into the spirit of the Russian landscape; and the beauty of the northern and central Russian steppes has given him material for magnificent scenes.

Levitan's most famous painting entitled 'A Quiet Habitation' depicts a monastery on a river bank under the shadow of a forest. This is a typical Russian scenery of life and landscape. In all his paintings the religious motive plays a great part. Another of his scenes, 'Eternal Peace', illustrates even better his ideas. It depicts a

little wooden church with wooden crosses over a few graves on a borderline on the River Volga. Levitan is a past master in expressing intimate beauty and grandeur by the most simple means. He is like a poet with a fine sense of the music of colour and line and his creations lead one gently into a new world of natural beauty where both sadness and gaiety intermingle freely.

When we pause in the front of Russian portraits the name of Michael Vrubel outshines by far all other painters. Although a Russian Jew, he has expressed in his portraits a delicate sensitiveness which is typical of the Russian peasant: Russian heroes or mystics figure in his portraits. 'The Demon' attracts by its peculiarity of mysticism and oriental beauty, woven into the tapestry of the portrait. It tells of the tragic love of a proud, world-weary demon for the beautiful daughter of a Georgian prince. How typically Russian is this intermingling of the real and imaginary creatures that populate the Russian world.

The typically Russian motive persists not only in their paintings but also in Russian sculpture. Men of great ability arose during the eighteenth century and created many monuments that have perpetuated the fame of the Russian sculpture. Prince Paul Trubetsky's works are appreciated farther afield than Russia. One remembers the fierce controversy that his statue of Alexander III provoked at the time of its unveiling. 'Moses' and 'Mephistopheles' by Antokolsky are other examples of the force and originality of the Russian sculpture.

In all these creations there is nothing of the smooth and insipid elegance that is usually agreeable to the onlooker's eye; these works are the very embodiment of rude power, of superstitious belief in the world beyond. If Russia's sculptors work in obscurity, and if their creations have not achieved the fame of those by Western sculptors, it is only because here again they express the sentiment and romanticism of the superstitious and highly religious Russian people, and not some more universal emotion.

Under the better working conditions for all artists, no matter what their medium—whether words or music or paint—in the Soviet Union, it may be that a new and better Russian graphic art will arise. There have been men who showed that the typically Russian outlook has a specific contribution to make to painting. Bakst had an oriental fervour about his work that might have grown into something outstanding had he not been diverted into the service of the ballet by Diaghilev. So with Benois. He designed brilliant *décors*

for the ballet and his other work showed something that might have come to mastery. The fact that Russia is now very conscious of her heritage from the past may intensify the movement to establish a truly Russian idiom in painting, not unduly hampered by the dictates of ideology.

In architecture the artistic genius of the Russian people has shown itself more brilliantly. The ancient churches can be ranked side by side with any of the monuments of Western Europe, and they have a style, a beauty all their own. Like the ikons, the churches were in the first place copied from Byzantine models, and the coloured cupola remains a feature of Russian ecclesiastical architecture, just as the spire and the steeple do in Western Europe. But this is only a detail. The style was quickly and skilfully adapted to local needs, and it is a fact that many of the ancient churches of Russia have the appearance of being organic parts of the landscape, so perfectly have they been conceived and executed.

One of the architectural glories of Russia was the Cathedral of Saint Sophia at Novgorod, built just before the Norman Conquest of England. Byzantine builders created it, but they had obviously become influenced by the Russian scene, and they attained that greatest and most difficult of achievements in architecture: a building that is in itself a perfect work of art and is at the same time absolutely at one with its surroundings.

This was followed in the eleventh and particularly in the twelfth centuries by a series of fine churches in what has become known as the Novgorod style built by Russian architects, unknown as are the true architects of the great Gothic churches of Europe. The style is based on an austere simplicity which depends for effect on the sheer mastery of balance in line and mass. The same style was seen in small chapels and village churches as in cathedrals and abbeys. It was an architecture planned by those who remembered the background of clear sky and snowclad fields, against which elaborate ornamentation would have been mere vulgar ostentation.

Kiev did not attain so high a standard. The Byzantine influence was less easily thrown off and the country was too unsettled to allow of reflective building. When the ecclesiastical shifted to Vladimir and later to Moscow, better work was done. The style was more ornamented than that of Novgorod, but the essential simplicity and balance remained the foundation. Another typical early church architecture was provided by the wooden churches of the north. These are perhaps the most Russian of all, for it has been said that, given an adze, a Russian can produce anything out of wood.

There was an outburst of architectural activity under both Peter

## ART AND ARCHITECTURE

the Great and Catherine. But the same influences as clogged the growth of native art elsewhere in these reigns affected architecture even more strongly. The first buildings in Peter's new capital were frankly Dutch, built by the Dutch architects he imported: and in fact he visualized Petersburg as a Dutch city. Later, Catherine imported Italian and Italian-trained architects to carry on the work. Thus it was that Petersburg was transformed into an Italianate Renaissance City, with strong baroque influences. Petersburg, as developed by Alexander I, became a city of colonnades and porticos, or arches and friezes. It has been described as a classical-baroque masterpiece, but there can be little doubt that there was little enough of the Russian character in it. In that Petersburg spoke of itself and proclaimed its status. It was a capital built outside Russia on Finnish soil. It grew not out of the native tradition but from the desire of Peter and Catherine for all things un-Russian.

Soviet architecture has passed through two distinct phases. In the early days it leant towards modern functionalism; and it was during this period that the fine modern cities of Kharkov and Stalingrad arose. More recently there has been a tendency to become more impressive and ornate, as in the much discussed Moscow Underground, with its black pilasters and elaborate decoration. Russian architecture under modern conditions has yet to find itself, but it is clearly alive and seeking for an individual mode of expression, which may well be midway between the demands of sheer functionalism and the elaboration of baroque. In one direction, however, the Russian architect is to-day acknowledged as leading the world: that is in town planning. The new Russian towns show a sense of fitness and beauty that is refreshing and astonishing to visitors grown accustomed to the chaos of the West, and might well serve as an inspiration for post-war planning in other parts of the world.

## Chapter 5

# SCIENCE

Peter the Great was the Tsar who introduced Western science into Russia, and he created a tradition of acknowledging foreign supremacy in all the fields of scientific knowledge, both pure and applied. It was to last long, and to some extent retarded the progress of a native school of thought. Science may be international, but none the less national tradition plays a great part in its development.

It has been said that the Russian temperament is not well suited to scientific work. It is held to be too imaginative and too easily satisfied. It is, so the critics allege, too ready to accept results not conclusively proved. None the less, in the period leading up to the Revolution, a great deal of very valuable work was done at the universities, in practical science, and in the Russian Academy of Science, which encouraged research much as the Royal Society did in England in the early days of its existence.

Yet it is undoubtedly true that there were, before the Revolution, very few Russian names written high on the roll of scientific achievement. Only two in fact could be considered to equal the second rank of leaders behind the truly great, like Newton, Darwin, and Faraday. Those two were Medeleef and Pavlov. It was the former who first stated the principle of the periodic table of chemical elements, which enabled him to predict the existence of certain undiscovered elements and the properties they should possess—predictions subsequently completely verified; and it was this work which led to startling developments in the basic theory of matter. Pavlov was one of the greatest experimental physiologists of all time. His work has profoundly influenced modern thought, particularly on the interaction of psychological stimuli and physiological effect.

The great period of scientific culture in Russia is without question the present. The Soviet is, it is claimed, based on the application of science to all the affairs of life. Science is the laws of matter, and communism is a materialistic philosophy, deriving from those laws. Hence, from the first, science has been given a prominent place in all Soviet planning and work.

In the first phases scientific research and development were in the hands of the industrial trusts and commissariats. The work was



mainly of an 'applied' *ad hoc* character, designed to solve specific problems. But later the field was widened. The immense importance of fundamental research, without a definite practical aim, was realized. To-day there is a vast scheme of scientific research and planning covering almost every field of human activity. It would require a book to describe it all adequately. Here it may be said that every industry—sometimes every factory or group of factories or farms—has its own research station, the work of which is co-ordinated with others through the central control of the industry. Above all is the reconstituted Academy of Sciences, responsible in actual fact for the scientific planning of work throughout the Union.

One of the great results of the Soviet method has been the dissolution of the needless distinction between 'pure' and 'applied' science. All science is seen as one, and the pursuit of knowledge goes on unceasingly. And already it has given, as the result of the intense encouragement of young research workers and the generous State support provided, a position of leadership to Soviet science in certain spheres.

In genetics, Soviet scientists have made many important discoveries, stimulated by the enormous needs of Soviet agriculture for better methods. Artificial insemination of livestock for breeding is but one of the major achievements of research in this field. The work on plants has been outstanding, and it has become a common practice for definite strains of certain crops to be produced to meet the special requirements of different parts of the country, notably Siberia where the summer, though hot in more northerly latitudes, is too short to allow of full ripening of normal crops. Hydroponics is another branch to which a great deal of attention has been given; this is the soilless cultivation of food plants in water tanks.

Low-temperature research is a field of pure science to which Soviet research has made outstanding contributions. Certain Soviet scientists studied at Cambridge and have continued their work in this research in their own country. The result has been a rapid and notable advance in a subject of the greatest theoretical importance, as well as practical interest as elucidating the behaviour of metals and other substances under extreme conditions.

Soviet medicine is another topic that deserves very comprehensive treatment of a kind that cannot be given here. In the Union what is probably the most elaborate free State service available to all in the world has been built up; and side by side with it research on an enormous scale has been pursued. Soviet contributions to medical science in the past few years have been as numerous as they have been important. Nerve grafting, methods of brain surgery, and

improvements in the technique of blood storage and transfusion, are only three of the branches in which Soviet research has led the way.

Science is the section of culture in which the Soviet régime has very definitely shown a new and radically different outlook. It is recognized as fundamental to the modern state, and funds are not stinted, while opportunities for all of ability are created on a wide scale. The weakness of Soviet research has been its relative isolation from the rest of the scientific world, but that is something which should now be destroyed with benefit not only to the Union but also to the scientific world at large.

And perhaps the Soviet Union is the one country in the world that recognizes science as a definite and very important branch of culture in the widest sense. The classical tradition in other lands tends to regard science as something purely utilitarian and of lower status than other branches of original thought and creative activity. The unique achievement of the cultural policy of the U.S.S.R. has been to give science, in the fullest interpretation, its proper place in modern affairs. The original creative power of the scientist is accepted as of equal importance with the creative genius of the artist, and it may be that this will be a pattern to which, in the fullness of time, other countries will conform.

## Chapter 6

# DRAMA AND FILM

To complete this brief survey of Russian culture, there remains but one of the main branches to discuss: the drama. This is a field in which, as in ballet, the Russian genius has found a particularly congenial field. The contributions of Russian thought to the drama are of lasting importance to the world.

It is not simply that Russia has produced some of the greatest dramatists, some of whom were mentioned in the chapter on literature and letters: Russians have also shown a remarkable talent for theatrical production. The Imperial Theatres of Moscow and Petersburg kept alive a strong classical tradition, drawing upon both native and foreign plays. Its schools, as those of ballet, maintained a supply of actors and actresses trained thoroughly in the technique of the stage. And it is noteworthy that a very keen interest has been shown in English works. It might perhaps have been accepted that Shakespeare should be performed; but it is somewhat surprising that Bernard Shaw found frequent presentation on the Russian stage even under the imperial régime.

Komissarzhevsky is a name that has become famous in the theatre for an original outlook and power of innovation, sustained into the days of the Soviet Union; and there have been scores of others, besides Diaghilev, who came out of Russia to show that the Russian stage was virile and progressive. One of these was Balaieff, whose *Chauve-Souris* offered something new in entertainment.

In their nurture of the drama the Soviets have shown a somewhat surprising liberalism. Dramatists have been encouraged to try new techniques, and the theatrical profession itself has been given a higher status than it has ever enjoyed before. Some of the plays have been amazing experiments, and if this phase is passing it has bequeathed to the contemporary Soviet theatre an enterprise and willingness to break with tradition that cannot but have far-reaching and important results.

One of the most praiseworthy features of Soviet drama is its encouragement of the work of national theatres. Each of the nationalities within the Union has set up its own special drama, where the native language is used and the work of native dramatists is per-

formed. And these are not merely local organizations. They are linked to the Union cultural plan. At regular intervals these national companies visit the capital and there give performances. Here again there is a vitalizing seed which may well bear rich fruit in the Russian theatre proper.

The stage itself is an evanescent thing. A great actor can live in history only as a name and a tradition. It is therefore impossible to deal historically, even in outline, with the growth of the Russian theatre. But this much has been said: the Russian, with his natural gifts of imagination and mime, is a born actor, and with the conditions that the Soviet have created, acting is a profession that is attracting, in normal times, some of the best of Russian youth. And so with the other theatrical arts of *décor* and production.

It is fitting to conclude with a brief reference to an allied art in which, for a short period, the Soviets led the whole world: the cinema. It is perhaps not too much to say that, coming late into the field, Russia took the final steps towards raising the film from a mere commercial entertainment to an art form.

It was primarily the directors Eisenstein and Pudovkin who analysed the material of cinema and brought film-making to a definite technique. They raised *montage*, or editing, to an art and, making primarily propaganda pictures, produced works of outstanding genius. *The End of St. Petersburg* and *Earth* were probably the two greatest silent films ever produced. They had a unity, a purpose, an emotional force that the American picture had never given and the German film, even at its best, never quite attained. The technique was new, daring, and stimulating. The use of natural material, instead of carefully prepared and trained film-actors, gave a fresh significance to the cinema as an art form and opened up new vistas of its potentialities. From the magnificent work of these pioneer Russian directors has risen the whole modern school of documentary film, in which many critics see the cinema's highest and most characteristic development. It is noteworthy that in this field Britain has achieved a success that has eluded her in more studied and artificial productions: another example of the *rapport* between Russian and British thought. And it is a somewhat pleasing reflection that that outstanding British film, *Desert Victory*, perhaps the finest thing Britain has yet given to the screen, can trace its ancestry back to the work of Eisenstein and Pudovkin and that lesser-known but none the less original director, Dziga-Vertov, the creator of the 'cine-eye' school.

One aspect of the great period of the Russian film is that it gives the lie to those who, noting the paucity of Russian graphic art, have

## DRAMA AND FILM

asserted that Russians have no pictorial sense. Many years have passed since the days of *Earth* and *Petersburg*, yet it is doubtful whether more beautiful examples of composition and atmosphere have ever been created than, for example, the work of the cameraman, Edward Tisse. He gave a new point to film photography that has been reflected in cinema the world over, not least in Hollywood.

With the coming of sound the international appeal of Russian films was inevitably reduced, and it is undeniable that there has been a somewhat steep falling off of quality. But latterly there have been signs of revival. Pudovkin is at work again, and with him a number of young directors who are showing great promise and originality. It may be that in the film, the typical art form of the day, the art form in which so keen a critic as Constant Lambert has seen the ultimate synthesis of all the arts, Russia may again claim leadership and see the apotheosis of her long cultural journey, which has already given so much to the world and seems inexhaustible in its possibilities.

## EPILOGUE

There is a question that to-day occupies a foremost position in the minds of all thoughtful people. What is the future of the relations of the Russian and British peoples? Is this a question on which history as we have tried to develop it here—as the product of the people rather than of dynasties—has any light to throw?

It must be stressed that it is the relation of peoples rather than of governments with which we are concerned. Not always do governments, even in democratic countries, speak with the voice of their peoples. Recent events, some occurring just before the present war began, suggested indeed to many that the voice of authority was often in a key the people themselves, given free choice, would not have selected.

The histories of Russia and Britain, running so close to each other in many periods and many times, are not altogether without comment to make on this problem of the near to-morrow. They cannot be left out when the possible course of the twenty years' treaty of friendship between Britain and Russia is considered.

One of their lessons is that there seems some destiny that draws the two countries always close together. While the official policy between the countries has so often been one of mistrust and suspicion, events have overcome misunderstanding and staked the fates of the two peoples on the throw of the same dice. Ever since Russia became an empire and forced her way eastwards through lands that were obviously hers, the British Empire, forcing its way across the world by sea, has found herself eyeing the intentions of Russia with misgiving as the Russian rulers have not always eyed British plans with favour.

For a generation or more Britain feared the approach of Russia in the direction of India. She fortified the frontier and sent the cream of the Indian Army to keep watch and ward over the great mountain passes that were the link between the great sea empire and the great land empire. For years the threat never materialized. And when at last danger came to India, and an armed and hostile force looked across the Indian frontiers, it was not Russian but Japanese. The forts on the passes in the north-west were built against an imaginary foe. The Burmese border was left virtually unprotected.



## EPILOGUE

So earlier in time the British Government had suffered from an attack of Russophobia. When Alexander I rolled back the French armies and shattered the Napoleonic legend of invincibility—as later Russian armies were to nail the lie of Hitler's invincibility—the British Government of the day, openly welcoming the victory, began frenzied negotiations in secret to build up an alliance against Russia, which was regarded as a danger to the peace of Europe and the security of the Empire.

In the troublous years that led to Serajevo and 1914, Britain played at first for the so-called 'natural' alliance with Germany. But events thrust her into uneasy alliance with Russia, which proved of inestimable value in gaining time for her to put in order her unprepared weapons of modern war. And that Russian alliance was not happy on either side. It is impossible to be comrades in war when there is mutual distrust.

The Revolution came and the old suspicions arrived once more in a new and more intense form. There was intervention. There was the cold shoulder. When diplomatic relations were at last resumed they were time and again broken. The fear of the Komintern bewitched the world. Britain in particular believed in the Western Trotsky and could not see in Stalin the true Russian leader concerned only for the welfare of Russia.

Who can deny that in the 'thirties many people—and those the most influential—saw a chance of destroying the Red Russian bogey for good and all by letting Hitler and his Nazis have their cherished free hand in Europe? It is a hard thing to say. But the truth must be realized if the future is not to bring forth its serpent's brood of lies and calumnies, of doubt and suspicion.

Yet the logic of history has ever proved more powerful than the vapourings of politicians, who rarely read history and then only with a biased eye. And when the blow fell on Russia there was a British leader strong enough to grasp its significance: Winston Churchill. He had played his part in the great Russian fallacy. But how courageously he pledged Britain to Russia!

That is the pledge that matters. Once again Britain and Russia stand side by side against a common foe. It is a position they must occupy always. For when Nazism and Fascism are crushed, there will still be a common foe to fight: the fear of insecurity in a competitive world.

Russian and British interests are one and complementary. The greatest land empire in the world—the U.S.S.R.—needs the help of the greatest sea empire—the British Commonwealth. Russia needs the sea. Britain needs the land, not to possess it but to share in its

## RUSSIAN CULTURE

resources. Both stand as intermediaries between East and West. Both straddle Europe and Asia. And both need the help and friendship of the United States.

It is the people's will in these matters that must count. If the British people had known more of the Russian people, the crass stupidities of British 'statesmen' would have been scotched. If the Russian people had been able to mix with the British people, the idea of a crushed British proletariat would never have arisen. Britons and Russians always get on well together. The work of the statesmen of to-morrow must be to ensure that that natural co-operation shall be extended to the great affairs of life.

The choice is plain. Either Britain and Russia go into separate camps again, building up European 'spheres of influence' to their own and each other's detriment, or they join together in mutual trust and comradeship to put Europe to rights, to make a *bloc* with the United States that will put an end to recurring war.

The peoples must face that choice and reach their decision. It should be an easy one. All history shows that Russia and Britain cannot draw apart for long. They seem to seek each other like opposite poles of a magnet. And history shows too that whatever the form of government, if the people speak strongly enough they get their will. The Russian people have crushed their autocrats, even when there was no parliament. The British have always done it. They must be as determined, both of them, that no petty squabbles, no intrigues, no red herrings, shall divert them from that unity which can be theirs as the natural gift of evolutionary progress and the similarity through difference of two great and cultured races.

# INDEX

- Addison*, 178  
*Alexander I*, 73, 141  
*Alexander II*, 131, 145, 156, 158  
*Alexander III*, 159, 160  
*Alexis I*, 90  
 Alphabet, Russian, 102  
*Anastasia Zakharin-Koshkin*, 64  
*Anne, Empress*, 105  
*Antokolsky*, 201  
 Architecture, 202  
 Art, 199  
*Askold*, 24, 30  
 Autocracy, beginning of, 58  
 Avaras, the, 18  
*Avvakum*, 181  
  
*Bakst*, 179, 195, 201  
*Balaieff*, 207  
*Balakirev*, 191, 192  
 Ballet, Russian, 178, 194  
*Balmont*, 188  
*Basil I, Emperor of Byzantium*, 30  
*Basil II*, 32  
*de Basil*, 195  
 Bayan, the, 196  
*Benois*, 201  
 Bespopovtzi, the, 130  
 Black Bulgars, 31, 49  
*Blok, Alexander*, 184  
 Bloody Sunday Massacre, 162  
*Blum, René*, 195  
*Bogolyubski, Andrey*, 37, 39  
 Bolshevism, 168  
*Borodin*, 191  
 Boyars, the, 63  
*Briusov, Valery*, 189  
 Bulgars, 21, 31, 49  
 Byzantine influence, 18  
 Byzantine trade, 23, 27  
  
 Castrati, the, 129  
*Catherine I*, 105  
*Catherine II, the Great*, 106, 108, 133, 138, 182, 203  
 Census, 88  
  
*Chaikovsky*, 178, 195, 195  
*Charlemagne*, 36  
*Chekhov*, 177, 183, 184  
 Chinese empire, 47  
*Chingiz Khan*, 47  
 Christianity, introduction of, 30  
     influence of, 56, 62  
 Church, influence of the, 56, 62, 113  
     reform, 120  
*Churchill, Winston*, 215  
 Cinema, the, 208  
 Composers, Soviet, 194  
 Constantinople, invasion of, 23  
 Constitution, parliamentary, 157  
 Cossacks, the, 71, 80  
 Crimean war, 145  
*Cui, César*, 191, 192  
 Culture, Russian, 175  
  
*Darius*, 17  
 Decembrist rising, 141  
 Democracy, beginning of, 151  
 Dialects, Slavonic, 18  
*Diaghilev, Sergei*, 179, 184, 193, 194, 207  
*Dionysius, Archimandrite*, 71  
*Dir*, 24  
*Dmitri I*, 69  
*Dmitri II*, 69  
 Dnieper Dam, 20  
*Dobroliubov*, 187  
*Donne*, 178  
*Donskoi, Dmitri*, 56  
*Dostoevsky*, 178, 183, 185, 186  
 Drama, Russian, 207  
 Duma, the, 157, 162  
 Dvoryanstvo, the, 107  
*Dziga-Vertov*, 208  
  
*Eisenstein*, 208  
*Elgar, Edward*, 178, 179  
*Elizabeth, Empress*, 105, 182  
 Emancipation of Nobles, 107, 110, 134  
*Engels*, 168

# INDEX

- European war, 161, 167
- Euxine, the, 18
- Feodor I*, 67, 87
- Feodor III*, 90
- Filipovitch, Danilo*, 128
- Films, 207
- Finnish retreat, 18
- Fisher, H. A. L.*, 35
- Fokine*, 195
- Frederick the Great of Prussia, 108
- French Revolution, 109, 139
- Galileo*, 19
- Ge*, 200
- Geographical boundaries, 20
- Geological origin of Russia, 11
- Glinka*, 191
- Gogol*, 178, 183
- Golden Horde, the, 51
- Gorky*, 178, 183
- Goths, the, 18
- Graeco-Roman Empire, 34, 40
- Greek colonization, 17
- Gulf of Riga, 21
- Hermogen, Patriarch*, 71
- Henry I of France*, 46
- Henry VIII of England*, 96
- Herodotus*, 17
- History, Early, 17
- Huns, the, 18, 47
- Igor*, 24, 26
- Ikons, 199
- Industrial revolution, 179
- Iranians, the, 17
- Ivan I, Kalita*, 55
- Ivan III, the Great*, 58
- Ivan IV, the Terrible*, 63, 181
- Ivan VI*, 105, 109
- Japanese War, 161, 162
- Judaism, 31
- Karsavina*, 195
- Kazan, 49
- Kazak—see Cossack
- Kerensky Revolution, 168
- Khazars, the, 21
- Kherson, capture of, 32
- Khlysti, the, 148
- Kiev Chronicle, 21
- Kiev, decline of, 37
  - history of, 22, 26, 44
  - sacking of, 50
- Kommissarzhevsky*, 207
- Kulak, the, 148
- Kumans, the, 37, 48
- Kuman-Rus Alliance, 49
- Labour shortage, 77
- Language, origin of, 18
- Lambert, Constant*, 209
- Laski, Professor*, 173
- Leontiev*, 184
- Lenin*, 58, 168
- Lermontov*, 183
- Levitan*, 200
- Liadov*, 193
- Literature, Russian, 180
- Lithuania, 21, 30, 51, 58
- Little Russia, 82, 110
- Livonia, 30
- Lomonosov*, 182
- Manchuria, 47
- Marx*, 168
- Maynard, Sir John*, 114
- Medileef*, 204
- Medicine, 205
- Michael III*, 23
- Michael Romanov*, 83
- Minin*, 70
- Mir, the, 44, 151
- Mongol invasion, 49
- Moscow, history of, 46, 55
  - siege of, 71
- Mossolov*, 194
- Moussourgsky*, 191
- Mouzhiks, the, 133
- Muscovite Empire, 59
- Music, Russian, 178, 191
- Nevski, Alexander*, 43, 45, 49
- Nicholas I*, 141
- Nicholas II*, 73, 159, 160
- Nicholas, Grand Duke*, 162
- Nihilists, the, 187
- Nikon, Patriarch*, 123
- Nizhinsky*, 179, 195
- Nobles, emancipation of the, 107, 110, 134

# INDEX

- Nomad tribes, 12
- Northmen invasion, 20
- Novgorod, founding of, 21
  - history of, 40
- Novgorodian rebellion, 22, 90
- October Revolution, 167, 169
  - Oleg*, 24, 26
  - Olga, Princess*, 30
  - Opera, Russian, 191
  - Oprichina, the, 65
  - Osetines, the, 17
- Pares, Sir Bernard*, 178
- Parliament, 157
- Paul, Prince*, 109
- Pavlov*, 204
- Peasant conditions, 75, 133
  - emancipation, 139, 142
- Pechenegs, the, 29
- Pereyaslavets, 28
- Permski, Stephen*, 57
- Persians, 17
- Perun (god), 30, 31, 33
- Peter I, the Great*, 25, 34, 37, 45, 58, 73, 92, 117, 137, 182, 200
- Peter II*, 105
- Peter III*, 108
- Petersburg, 45, 95
- Philaret*, 84
- Photius, Patriarch*, 23
- Philippopolis, sacking of, 28
- Pisarev*, 287
- Plehve*, 161
- Polish invasion, 34, 69
  - landowners, 144
- Polish-Russian agreement, 158
- Poland, first partition of, 110
- Polish diets, 44
- Pop, the (parish priest), 22
- Popovtzi, the, 130
- Pososhkov*, 182
- Pozhariski, Prince*, 70
- Pripet marshes, 18
- Pskov, 26
  - rebellion, 90
- Pudovkin*, 208
- Pugachev rebellion, 110
- Purcell*, 179
- Pushkin*, 183, 192, 193
- Rakhmaninov*, 194
- Raspol, the, 123
- Raskolniki, the, 125
- Rasputin*, 127, 166
- Razin, Stenka*, 90
- Religious sects, 128
- Renaissance, the, 54
- Revolution, the Kerensky, 168
  - industrial, 179
  - October, 167
- Richardson*, 178
- Riepin*, 200
- Rimsky-Korsakov*, 191
- Romanov, Michael*, 72, 80
- Romanovs, the, 64
  - accession to the throne, 75
- Rostov, Duke of*, 53
- Rubinstein*, 193
- Rurik*, 21, 40, 65
- Rus, origin of the, 21
  - life of the, 38
- Ryazan forts, 81
- Samartians, 17
- Scandinavian migration, 20
- Science, 204
- Sculpture, 201
- Scythians, the, 17
- Serfdom, 74, 87, 133
- Shaw, Bernard*, 207
- Shipov*, 161
- Shishkin*, 200
- Sholokhov*, 184
- Shostakovich*, 194
- Shuisky, Vasilii*, 69
- Siberia, 45, 57, 66
  - colonization of, 81
- Sigismund, King of Poland*, 69
- Simbersk, battle of, 90
- Skakalzi, the, 129
- Skriabin*, 193
- Slave trade, 38, 74
- Slav tribes, 17
- Slavonic invasion, 18
- Sofia, Princess*, 93
- Sophia, Saint, 32
- Sologub, Feodor*, 189
- Solovyov*, 184
- Soviet, the, 163
- Soviet composers, 194
- Soul tax, the, 101

# INDEX

- Stalin*, 170  
*Stolypin, Peter*, 163  
*Stravinsky, Igor*, 195, 195  
*Streltsy*, the, 95  
*Svyatoslav, Prince*, 28  
 Swedish invasion, 43, 69  
     wars, 94  
 Taiga, 19  
 Tartar domination, end of, 59  
 Tartar invasion, 37, 47  
 Teutonic invasion, 18  
 Theatre, Russian, 107  
 Thebaid, the, 116  
*Theodor, Prince (Fedor)*, 67  
 Time of Troubles, 68, 69  
*Tisse, Edward*, 209  
*Tolstoy, Alexei*, 92, 184  
*Tolstoy, Leo*, 178, 183, 184, 186,  
     187  
 Trade with Britain, 66  
 Trans-Siberian Railway, 149  
 Tribal settlements, 20  
*Trubetsky, Prince Paul*, 201  
 Tsar, the first, 60  
 Tsargrad, 23, 27  
     siege of, 28  
 Tsarism, origin of, 52  
*Turgeniev*, 178, 183, 186  
 Turkestan, 47  
 Turkish tribes, 21  
 Turkish invasion, 29, 37, 47  
*Tzimiskes, Emperor John*, 28, 29  
 Ukaz, the, 125  
 Urals, 21  
 Uspenski Cathedral, 56  
*Uspensky, Gleb*, 184  
 Varangian invasion, 21  
*Vasili III*, 61  
 Veche, the, 42  
*Vereshchagin*, 200  
*Vladimir the Great*, 38, 56  
*Vladimir Monomakh*, 37  
*Vlas, Saint*, 122  
*Vrubel*, 201  
*Wagner*, 178  
 War with Japan, 161, 162  
*Williams, Harold W.*, 34  
*Witte*, 163  
*Wlasislaw, Tsar*, 70  
*Yaroslav*, 36, 40, 61  
*Yermak*, 81  
*Yusef, Patriarch*, 123  
 Zemstvos, the, 154, 161



Acc. No.	16389
Class No.	G. 36.
Book No.	96